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# A Step into The Past

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Book 09

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Huang Yi

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## **Chapter 1**

### **Ambush on the Narrow Gorge**

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Xiang Shaolong and Lord Longyang rode out together out of the city, protected front and back by high skilled bodyguards.

After receiving the news that Xiang Shaolong was about to arrive in Handan, the atmosphere in the city had been very tense, like a tightly drawn bowstring, forcing everyone not to be able to take a breather.

Even though everyone was itching for a fight, seemingly very confident, but everyone was afraid that they will be one of the unlucky ones.

From this it could be seen that he had built a god-like reputation, no one dared to underestimate him.

Lord Longyang brought his horse nearer to him and said, "Why haven't I seen Long Shan?"

Xiang Shaolong secretly commended Lord Longyang for being observant.

During this dangerous warring period, everyone was always vigilant. If it was any other influential officials, if they had someone as powerful as Teng Yi, they would want him close by to protect them twelve hours of the day. So when Xiang Shaolong went out without him close by was really something out of the ordinary.

He smiled, "This is my first time to a big city. So with all the excitement to go shopping, I wouldn't feel right without someone to accompany me."

Lord Longyang was only asking out of curiosity and not because of some suspicions, changing his topics, "Li Yuan sees Brother Dong as number one rival in love. He has misunderstood your intentions. It's truly outrageous."

Xiang Shaolong was confused, "My Lord, why do you say this?"

Lord Longyang smiled, "The person that Ji Yanran is in love with is Xiang Shaolong. Oh! Maybe, Yanran, herself, hasn't realised. The expression on her eyes when she's looking at Shaolong compared to when she's looking at others is totally different. Maybe at that time, she hadn't realised yet that she had fallen in love with Xiang Shaolong, but I had known for sure."

Xiang Shaolong's heart trembled in fear. This Lord Longyang is definitely someone with sharp observation skill. If he's not careful, he might accidentally reveal his identity from the slight tip of his eyebrow. He must be constantly alert around him. Lord Longyang grunted, "I don't believe that Ji Yanran and Xiang Shaolong didn't already have a secret agreement. As long as we observed Ji Yanran closely, we can surely lure Xiang Shaolong out."

Xiang Shaolong frowned, "Didn't you also want to take care of Learned Lady Ji?"

Lord Longyang sighed, "I have always viewed her as an irreplaceable friend. She fell in love with Xiang Shaolong is a natural thing. Mister Dong hasn't yet seen Xiang Shaolong, he is someone with out of this world talents. Regardless

of his style of conversation, insight, heart or spirit, they are all distinctive amongst us. I, myself, would like to be his friend, if we weren't already standing on the opposite grounds as enemies. But now, I have to find any way to assassinate him regardless of how unscrupulous it might be."

Xiang Shaolong intentionally probed him out, "Even though I know that I don't have an ounce of hope of attaining Learned Lady Ji, but I felt that she has high regard of me. Hey! According to your observation, how does it compare when she looks at me compared to looking at Xiang Shaolong?"

Lord Longyang nodded, "She truly regards you highly. That's for sure. The problem is she is a once and one type of person, unlike that promiscuous Lady Ya. Xiang Shaolong had the advantage of entering her heart first, you and Li Yuan would be better off to forget about her."

Xiang Shaolong laughed, "The situation doesn't seem hopeless yet. We have someone as powerful as you here, My Lord, to take care of Xiang Shaolong. We can already count down the days that he stayed alive. At that time, wouldn't Learned Lady Ji need to start searching for another person?"

Lord Longyang smiled bitterly, "The fact has proven that everyone who underestimates Xiang Shaolong will end up on the losing ground. No matter how the Zhaos tried to arrange everything, I still believe that Xiang Shaolong would have ingenious plan to sneak into Handan. With the craftiness of both Lu Buwei and Xiang Shaolong, how could they have leaked their whereabouts to the other hostile party in Qin, there must be some trap in there."

Xiang Shaolong trembled in fear.

He started to realise that this Lord Longyang isn't a simple person. No wonder he could become Lord Xinling's formidable adversary.

Amongst all of the countries' influential politicians here in Handan, beside the heavyweight class Tian Dan, Lord Longyang also needed to be counted in.

But his weakness is: Hey! It seems like he has fallen in love with himself, so he has confided in himself, hoping to win Xiang Shaolong's good favour. Oh my God! This is such a complete mess. Such complicated situation!

At that time, they had left the Handan city far away, riding along the government road towards the Hidden Army Valley, surrounded from both sides with tall mountains in the open countries in the autumn weather, with withered and fallen leaves.

Lord Longyang's underlings were all seemingly like they have reached the countryside relaxing and stretching their muscles. Lord Longyang saw Xiang Shaolong was quiet without a word, knew that he was pondering his words previously, joyfully continued, "Xiang Shaolong has three important enemies: King Xiaocheng, Zhao Mu and Guo Zhong. As long as Xiang Shaolong is alive, I am afraid that these three people wouldn't be able to sleep peacefully."

Xiang Shaolong was suddenly filled with uneasy feelings. This was called a soldier's alertness. It didn't need a factual proof for a reason.

This time, they were about to enter one of the small narrow gorge towards the Hidden Army Valley. Both sides were surrounded with dense thick forest. If there was an ambush, this would be the idealist place for it.

Xiang Shaolong swiftly stopped his horse.

Lord Longyang continued for another ten or more steps before noticing it and looked back, filled with confusion, “Is there a problem, Mister?”

When the rest noticed that Lord Longyang had stopped his horse, they all followed his lead.

Xiang Shaolong continued gazing towards the entrance of the narrow gorge, frowned, “Have you and Xiang Shaolong ever celebrate a festival before?”

Lord Longyang was slightly surprised, turned his horse’s head to follow his gaze towards the narrow gorge, ordered his underlings, “Go open the road for me!” More than ten riders rode out from amongst the crowd towards the narrow gorge.

Those persons’ shields were all hanging on the side of their horses. Apparently, they didn’t believe that there would be someone waiting to ambush them.

Xiang Shaolong was also extremely puzzled, who would want to take care of Lord Longyang? Could it be that he’s being overly cautious, raising a false alarm?

Lord Longyang relaxed a little as he saw his underlings entered the gorge, smiled, “If Xiang Shaolong came to take care of me, then there must be some kind of misunderstanding. Otherwise, how would he know that I will go to the Hidden Army Valley today?” Xiang Shaolong’s uneasiness was growing by the minute.

After exercising the meditation method according to the Mohist Addendum, his sixth sense had become sharper. It had repeatedly saved him from dangerous situations, otherwise he might still be nursing his grievances back in Xianyang.

Even though the autumn sun was still hanging low in the sky, but he could feel the chill in the air.

Lord Longyang shouted, “Have you clearly thought about what I told you before, Mister Dong?”

Xiang Shaolong felt a headache coming, changed a topic, “How come your underlings haven’t come back yet?” Even before the words finished spoken, crying sounds could be heard. One of his famous swordsman underling appeared from the gorge, waved from far away indicating that everything’s alright.

Xiang Shaolong was embarrassed for being overly suspicious.

On the contrary, Lord Longyang consoled him, “It’s never wrong to be more careful! I admired Mister Dong alertness!”

Everyone continued riding towards the gorge.

Lord Longyang spoke in his soft and sweet tone, “Mister, have you ever ponder over our current war and what you would do to establish a long-lasting career for yourself?”

Xiang Shaolong was amazed at his craftiness. This person definitely has a sharp intelligence, something that most people have long been lacking in this period. He had seen that he's not the type of person who'd be happy raising horses his whole life. That's why he uttered these words.

When they were about 100 steps from the entrance, Xiang Shaolong suddenly felt alarmed again. But he could only indistinctly catch a blurry shadow and nothing concrete.

He casually replied, "Besides rearing horses, I know nothing about the art of war. Just based on fierceness, how could I lead the three armies through the desert?"

Lord Longyang smiled, "Mister doesn't have to be modest. Just from looking at how you've been trained and that you have no fear of death, I know that you have the talent to be a famous general, otherwise, Tian Dan would have ignored you."

Now, they were about 50 more steps from the entrance, the front guards had started to enter the gorge.

An idea suddenly flashed through Xiang Shaolong's mind. He whipped his horse and shouted, "Quick! Turn around!" Now he realised the reason for his uneasiness.

Lord Longyang's underling that passed the safe signal before quickly returned the gorge after signalling. It just didn't make sense. Inside the gorge, there were 10 more Lord Longyang's personal bodyguards. As a reconnaissance

team, they should have guard the entrance and exit of the gorge, along with all of the strategic points inside the gorge until Lord Longyang passed through before withdrawing their position. Otherwise, if the enemies ambush from the entrance and the exit, wouldn't they be surrounded and died inside? Xiang Shaolong also wasn't basing this from the carelessness of Lord Longyang's underling alone but because he had been on guard the whole time, he finally realised that if his enemy was planning on ambushing them there, they wouldn't have placed anyone in the dangerous zone. That's why he quickly rushed back in.

This time, Lord Longyang and his four personal bodyguards all frowned at him. They all felt that he's being too extremely cautious.

The front guards ignored his warning and kept on riding into the entrance.

Lord Longyang forcefully reined in his horse to be polite. As he was about to speak, a tragic scream could be heard faintly coming from the gorge.

Everyone's face paled. Suddenly, a stream of enemies flow out from inside the gorge, each one of them was holding a crossbow and arrows, and stringing them on. The front group of 10 or more soldiers jumped off their horse and prepared a frontline defence.

At the same time, killing shouts could be from all four corners.

From both sides of the dense forest, the enemies flowed out. In an instant, enemies could be seen everywhere.

All of these people dressed as common people. As far as the eyes could see, there must be at least several hundred people. Lord Longyang personal guards, even though they were elite soldiers who have experienced hundred battles, but there were many enemies compared to them. Crossbows were also hard to guard against. Without any time to prepare, they've been ambushed and were now in complete disarray.

Xiang Shaolong ducked down and avoided two arrows but from underneath, he could hear a pitiful neigh and the horse reared up.

He didn't even get a chance to see where his horse had been shot, both feet fiercely kicked off, forcing him to lean sideways and fell off the saddle. He leaped across towards Lord Longyang, held on his waist and leaped off the horse. Both fell on the bushes on the side of the road. Lord Longyang's saddle had long fallen off the horse, it was filled with arrows.

Lord Longyang was the enemy's main goal.

His number one underlings, Jiao Xu, and other unhurt underlings all jumped off their horse and rushed in to protect Lord Longyang.

Lord Longyang was about to join in the fight when Xiang Shaolong dragged him back to the forest. Surrounded on all four sides with battles, all around killing sounds can be heard. The enemies had finished their first batch of arrows and hurrying to reload their arrows. This was exactly the perfect time to escape.

Wind of swords swished through.

Xiang Shaolong's back was leaning against the grass. He moved his two feet, continuously pressuring the enemies back.

Those two people screamed in agony. While trying to scramble away, they rushed into three other attacking enemies.

"Clang!" Xiang Shaolong pulled out his long sword out of the sheath, followed with two people spilled their blood.

When he leaped up, Lord Longyang shook out of his reverie, pulled out his sword and sprung forward. "Swish!" His sword flew like a water dragon, slaying two rushing enemies instantly.

Jiao Xu and the other ten more guards fought and retreated at the same time towards the forest while protecting them both.

Xiang Shaolong knew that they were in danger just from looking that they were surrounded on all sides by the enemies. He quickly determined the best way to break out of the enemy's barricade, shouted, "Follow me!" He waved around Blood Wave, leaving behind layers of the sword's shadows, leading the way out of the barricade and deep into the forest.

His swordsman skill was superb. His strength surprised others. Moreover, inside the forest, the enemies were unable to take advantage of their numbers to crush them. They were truly swept over by the wind.

"Dang!" One of the enemy was chopped off by him to the point of scaring away all of the onrushing enemies.

But this scene would only last for a second before the reinforcement arrived and countless enemies rushed forward again.

Xiang Shaolong entered the Mohist's defensive mind, calmly leading Lord Longyang and the others deeply into the forest, even killing seven eight enemies on the way.

Xiang Shaolong took advantage of this time to observe Lord Longyang and the others.

At this time, besides Jiao Xu, there were only seven people left following them. Everyone of them was badly injured. The situation was extremely dangerous.

But the enemies kept coming like tidal wave.

Even though Lord Longyang forged ahead courageously, but he was covered in blood. Not sure though whether it's his blood or the enemies' blood splashed onto him.

His right back shoulder was blotched bright red.

Xiang Shaolong wildly shouted, swung his sword backhand and penetrated the abdomen of the raid soldier, followed with a flick of his wrist to fend off an attack from the left side. While the opponent dodged his attack, in that instant of gap, he continuously attacked, wildly stabbed, and hardly penetrated the enemy's chest.

When the enemies saw how brutal he can be, they all retreated, allowing him to enter by several meters.

“Peng!” Lord Longyang staggered and bumped into his back. It seemed like he’d been injured again by the enemy’s poisonous hand.

Xiang Shaolong shouted loudly, “Don’t worry about me!” He waved his sword, killing another attacker.

“Argh!” One of the guard injured badly and toppled over, the situation had just become more critical.

Xiang Shaolong’s Blood Wave sword was like a lightning. Within a move, an enemy instantly met with a violent death. He fiercely pulled Lord Longyang, at the same time, he called out to Jiao Xu and the rest, “Follow me!” Forcing his way into the left side of the enemy’s net, he repeatedly waved his Blood Wave, forcing the enemy to retreat one by one.

During this time when they were bathed in blood like the war, Xiang Shaolong displayed his boldness, strong stamina and his years of strict training as an elite soldier. He was like a never tiring machine, moving freely amongst the enemy formation.

Amongst all this, he still didn’t forget to examine all four surroundings. He saw on the left hand side, not far away, there was a slope road. That’s why he called Lord Longyang and the others to follow him to break through the formation.

One move of attacking to defend executed quickly and violently.

“Argh!” The enemy’s sword was split in half. While he was shocked, Xiang Shaolong moved sideways and kicked him, causing him to spewed out blood

repeatedly and felt on the big tree behind him.

Xiang Shaolong dodged right and left, swung backward and stabbed the left chest of the enemy that tried to surprise attack him from behind. While at the same time, he moved and tackled the enemy till he tumbled down and met the earth.

Up till now, he had succeeded in breaking out and killing all the way to the edge of the slope. The pressure had been reduced. Gazing downward, he saw a strong flowing river.

Xiang Shaolong was overjoyed. He turned back, pulled out his sword swiftly and broke into the formation surrounding Lord Longyang, Jiao Xu and the rest. Amongst them, one was at the end of his life.

Xiang Shaolong used his sword to forcefully sweep away his enemies, shouted, "Jump down! That's the only way to escape with your life." He turned around and pounced on Lord Longyang, grabbing his waist and rolling down the slope, not knowing how many branches and leaves they've broken and smashed along the way.

Jiao Xu and the other five bodyguards dared not hesitate. All followed his way and rolled down the hills. "Splash... splash..." All eight people fell into the river successively, instantly dying the river blood red.

Xiang Shaolong grabbed hold of Lord Longyang and swam away following the river's currents. Before long, they had left the place far away.

The enemy pursued by following along the river.

Up the front, the water noise grew louder like an exploding volcano.

Before anyone realised what's happening, the currents were moving faster and faster. Unexpectedly they had reached the edge of around 7 metres high waterfall. They immediately fell onto the pool below following the waterfall. When everyone was still recovering from the high fall, the current brought them away again. The enemies' shout was growing quieter as the distance grew.

When Xiang Shaolong, Lord Longyang and the rest met the Zhaos convoys, it was already midnight. (三更 means the time between 11-1pm so midnight would closely reflect that in here).

Even though the injuries had been properly bind up, but because everyone had lost a lot of blood and was tired, they all looked pale and exhausted. Two amongst them even had a fever which required immediate attention.

Zhao Mu, Le Cheng and the rest had already received the news and were waiting anxiously on the gate.

Zhao Mu and Lord Longyang had always had a private agreement between each other, while Xiang Shaolong was his hope of ascending the throne. His heart was burning with worry. On the other hand, if Le Cheng, acting as Handan's guardian's general, allowed anything to happen to this important Wei's official, Lord Longyang, it would be hard for him not to get blamed for it. So, both of them were equally anxious and worried.

Both Zhao Mu and Le Cheng scrambled forward towards Xiang Shaolong and Lord Longyang's horse cart. When they saw both of their appearance, even

though a little bit shocking, but since there wasn't any fatal injury, they were both able to breathe a sigh of relief.

Lord Longyang was secretly watching Xiang Shaolong affectionately, strenuously uttered, "If it wasn't for Mister Dong risking his life to save mine, I wouldn't have any left to meet you two anymore."

Xiang Shaolong smiled bitterly.

It could be said that Lord Longyang is his number one mortal enemy, but at that time, there was no time to think about this problem, even if he had this idea, he wouldn't be able to not rescue him when he saw it. This was so like what Tian Dan had analysed, "Softhearted," is truly his biggest weakness. Le Cheng heavily said, "Did you see Xiang Shaolong?"

Xiang Shaolong and Lord Longyang were both astounded.

The latter frowned, "It doesn't seem like it was Xiang Shaolong. But during those chaotic situation, we only cared about escaping, using the river to escape, and didn't have the time to see clearly who the enemy might be."

Le Cheng replied, "I've already sent out soldiers to seal off all roads and scout the area. Hopefully, we will receive the good news soon to report to my Lord."

Lord Longyang and Xiang Shaolong knew that he didn't have any confidence of this just from listening to his tone.

The raiding party surprisingly was able to slip within 15kms of the area surroundings Handan in great secrecy. It wouldn't surprise them if they had already prepared an escape route.

But who would want to get rid of Lord Longyang? Xiang Shaolong of course knew that it wasn't he himself who was responsible.

Lord Longyang wasn't sure whether the reason why he wasn't interested in speaking up was due to the injuries he had sustained.

Both Zhao Mu and Le Cheng personally escort Lord Longyang and Xiang Shaolong separately returning to their residence.

Shan Rou and the Tian sisters had long heard of the news and were both waiting in front of the gate to welcome him home.

Le Cheng then took leave.

Shan Rou complained, "If I knew, I would have come with you!" Wu Guo was confused, "Who did it?"

Tian Zhen and Tian Feng supported him inside towards the inner chamber. Both sisters had long been crying till their eyes were red and swollen.

Xiang Shaolong bitterly smiled, "Let me rest a little bit before I will explain everything clearly to you, alright?"

Suddenly, he remembered the circumstance of which Lord Longyang's

underling lured them into entering the gorge.

He trembled when he realised who probably would like to assassinate Lord Longyang.

No wonder he's got that long face.

## Chapter 02

### Faking injury

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While the Tian sisters and Shan Rou were frantically dressing the wounds on Xiang Shaolong, he had a brainwave. To Wu Guo he inquired: "If there any where to make me look even worse? I want to give others the impression that I am so badly injured that I cannot even get up!" Scratching his head for a while, the impatient Shan Rou cut in: "Let me disguise you like a corpse and scare the hell out of everyone who sees you."

Tian Zhen and Tian Feng could not hold their giggles.

Xiang Shaolong explored: "That is not enough. It is best to make me bleed non-stop or even a high fever all over my body."

Tian Feng chuckled: "Leave this to us sisters. Just hide heat pads under the blanket."

Shan Rou and Wu Guo looked at each other before they both turned to him. They cannot comprehend what tricks is he up to?

Xiang Shaolong commanded Wu Guo: "At dawn, send someone out of the city and invite Big Brother and Little Jun back with half of our forces. At the same time, bring someone to see me immediately. "

He then taught him how to liaise with Pu Bu.

Knowing that Xiang Shaolong is going into action, Wu Guo left happily. The Tian sisters started working on the heat pad. Shan Rou sat by the bed and personally applied a layer of white powder on his mask. Frowning, she whined: "Aren't you going to tell me what you are up to?" Instead, Xiang Shaolong's mind is on another subject. Shaking his head, he protested: "This Sucks. If someone touches my face, their hands will be stained by the powder and everyone will know that I am faking my injuries. "

Paying no heed to his words, Shan Rou left the room and came back shortly with a full haversack. In a cold and negative manner, she demanded: "This is not my problem. Quickly tell me your plans. Otherwise, I will not display my best skill and help you to fake your injuries."

Xiang Shaolong bitterly laughed: "Work on the injuries first. If delayed and I have visitors, the scheme will fall apart."

Pouting, Shan Rou held her obvious anger and produced several bottles of different sizes from her haversack. She poured liquids from them and started to mix them in a separate basin.

Xiang Shaolong reached out his hand and caressed her elastic and smooth legs. Shan Rou exclaimed: "I want to kill a man! But I cannot disclose who he is yet!" Shan Rou's slender body trembled slightly and gazed towards him.

The sky has yet to brighten when King Xiaocheng descended upon his residence with his entourage. Seeing his corpse-like look and with a temperature running, King Xiaocheng was terrified. He cried: "Subject Dong! They had said your injuries are not serious. This won't do! I must summon

the Imperial Physician to attend to you.”

Now, it is Xiang Shaolong’s turn to be shocked. In a hoarse voice, he frantically replied: “I am deeply grateful for Your Majesty’s benevolence. I caught a bad chill when I fell into the river and lost a lot of blood to end up in this state. I will need only a few days rest to get back to my feet. Moreover, I have subordinates who are well-versed in medicine and I am used to their prescriptions. If we change the medication, I am afraid of side effects. Ai!”

He pretended to cry out and even showed his blood-stained blanket and his open wound on the shoulder.

King Xiaocheng was amazed that he was more severely injured than Lord Longyang. Thinking for a while, his eyes turned ferocious and interrogated: “Did you catch a glimpse of Xiang Shaolong?” Swerving around and patting his head, he added: “I was not thinking clearly and have forgotten that you have never seen this traitor.”

Xiang Shaolong was tickled.

After a moment a silence, he praised: “On this fateful trip, it is all thanks to Subject Dong protection of Lord Longyang or he will surely lose his life. If he died, how am I to account for it to King Anli? And the hope of an alliance treaty will also go up in smoke.”

Xiang Shaolong could only smile sourly.

He originally came to Handan to kill but under the unique circumstances, he saved the lives of Zhao Mu and Lord Longyang. Right now, even he does not

believe that he is Xiang Shaolong, much less others.

He purposely investigates: “Your Majesty has probably visited Lord Longyang; did he say that he saw Xiang Shaolong?” King Xiaocheng shook his head and replied: “Lord Longyang is almost as badly injured as you. His spirits are very low and he refuses to say anything. But except for Xiang Shaolong, no one is that powerful. And only he can access information in Handan from spies. Now that he is the ba5tard of Qin, he would naturally fight against the five other states.” Sensing his tone, Xiang Shaolong recognized that King Xiaocheng does not consider the State of Yan to be an ally or an equal. He deduced that Zhao King has not succumbed to the pressures of Li Yuan and Tian Dan.

King Xiaocheng can see that Xiang Shaolong has difficulties opening his eyes. Patting his feverish shoulder, he promised: “Subject Dong please rest well. I will send some rare medicine for external injuries.”

Standing up, he continued: “Your abilities are not limited to horse-breeding. I will give you more responsibilities in the future.”

After King Xiaocheng left, Xiang Shaolong could not hold back his exhaustion and truly fell into deep slumber. In his sleep, he can sense human activity and visitors to his bedside. Wu Guo is always present and naturally described his injuries in detail and exaggerating some facts. Actually, he needs not say anything. The heavy smell of medication and the “bleeding” open wound is sufficient to paint a bleak picture.

At the appointed time, Pu Bu arrived.

Xiang Shaolong was in high spirits and they had a good talk. The attendant reported that Zhao Ya is here to visit him and Pu Bu hurriedly left from the back door.

Zhao Ya moved to his bedside and put her hand on his steaming forehead. Startled, she withdrew her hand and exclaimed: "You are sick!"

Opening his eyes by half, Xiang Shaolong replied: "It's ok! I will be fine after two days of sleep!"

Scrutinising his complexion, she sighed: "Luckily, there is still energy in your eyes. Otherwise, it would be disastrous."

Xiang Shaolong was shaken, knowing that Zhao Ya had seen the only loophole. Fortunately, she had yet to raise any suspicions. He was puzzled at her calmness over the "Xiang Shaolong reappearance" and tested: "Seems like Xiang Shaolong came to Handan earlier; or else your old man (himself) would have caught him." Zhao Ya cocked her head and softly analyzed: "The assassination of Lord Longyang can be masterminded by Tian Dan, Li Yuan, Zhao Mu or even Prince Xinling but it will never be Xiang Shaolong. I know him too well. Unless it is his sworn enemy, he will never kill. Lord Longyang did not have any enmity with him and he will not raise the alarm with such a meaningless act."

Xiang Shaolong is astonished at Zhao Ya's attention to such minute details. Feelings started to swell up again in him. Knowing that he is a good man, why did she still conspire with King Xiaocheng and Zhao Mu to harm him?

Xiang Shaolong has suspected it was Prince Xinling's assassination plot but after Zhao Ya's explanation, he started to waver on his earlier conclusions.

Zhao Mu is definitely out of the picture. Li Yuan and Tian Dan are the main suspects as they have a strong motive. The power struggle in Wei is the Wei King and Lord Longyang versus Prince Xinling. In addition, Lord Longyang is the heir to Anli (Wei King). If anything befalls him, Anli will lay the blame on Prince Xinling and fight him to death.

When Wei descends into chaos, the main beneficiaries are Qi and Chu who are opposed to the three-state ally.

Now that Qin is disunited and are not preparing any offensive campaigns, this is the best time for the rest of the states to display their strengths.

Remembering the Lu Gong secret manual, he decided: "Xiang Shaolong may be working with Prince Xinling to deal with Lord Longyang." Zhao Ya factually countered: "Prince Xinling could not wait to tear Xiang Shaolong apart and drink his fresh blood. Xiang Shaolong is also someone who will not bow to his command. How can there be such a possibility?"

Xiang Shaolong pretended to be surprised and asked: "What event has caused this enmity?" Craftily, Zhao Ya whispered: "This is a secret. Mister has yet to fulfil his obligation. Once you succeed, I will tell you everything I know."

Xiang Shaolong was hopping mad but was touched by her appreciation. He closed his eye and sighed: "I am getting tired. Thank you Princess for your

care and concern.”

Zhao Ya did not want to leave after such a short visit. She stood up reluctantly but leaned forward towards Xiang Shaolong. She lowered her petite head and kissed him fully on his lips, her tongue snaking out.

Xiang Shaolong is afraid she may detect his scent. He changed his style and attacked her flexible tongue roughly. He used a lot of force and grabbed her breasts wildly.

Unexpectedly, Zhao Ya did not mind his uncouth manners and lie down and begin tussling with him lustfully.

As things are getting out of hand, Zhao Ya aggressively retreated. Red-faced, she shrieked: “No! You cannot lose control now.” Giving him a look, promised: “Once you are well, I will let you do whatever you want to me!”

Old feelings swelled up in Xiang Shaolong, making him horni. Sighing lightly, he apologised: “Please forgive subject for being unable to send Princess out.”

Curling her eyelashes in a smile, she sashayed off. Just as she stepped out, Ji Yanran’s entourage arrived. Seeing his devastated condition, hot tears poured out from her eyes. When the truth is revealed, her sadness turned into glee.

Sitting on his bed hugging his sweet-smelling belle, he enquired: “Have you seen Lord Longyang?” Ji Yanran happily commented: “You are really farsighted. Nothing can escape your eyes. Hai! Though I am your wife, I am

the last to know about your injuries. I was terribly anxious but still have to force myself to visit that cross-dressing fellow first to avoid suspicion. There is more to come. When I come to visit my husband, I have to be interrogated by that wild b1tch who is masquerading as your wife. My hubby! You must decide for me and give me the justice I deserved.” Xiang Shaolong could feel his headache expanding. He slipped both his hands into the clothes and started to fondle, hoping to distract her. Changing the topic, he disclosed: “Before the attack, Lord Longyang confided in me. He told me to give up on you for the person Talented Lady Ji has fallen for is not Dong Kuang, nor Li Yuan, but the number one enemy of the six states Xiang Shaolong.”

Under his daring fondling, Ji Yanran moaned: “Number one enemy of the Six States, Shaolong’s words are indeed fresh and creative. Oh! No wonder Lord Longyang is focusing all his attention on me. Ai! Shaolong! Are you trying to kill me? Ah! If this goes on, I am going to want you right now.”

Xiang Shaolong frightfully withdrew his hands; he has to be “ready” for potential visitors.

Ji Yanran lied on his body with her face red like embers. She groaned: “Has Shaolong concluded who is the mastermind behind the assassination?” Xiang Shaolong stroked her fair back and replied: “I wish to seek the wisdom of Talented Lady.”

Biting his ear in return, she answered: “The biggest suspect would be Prince Xinling. He will definitely send people to retrieve the Lu Gong Secret Manual stolen by you. As a matter of fact, everyone here would love to lay their hands on the manual.”

Stressed, Xiang Shaolong suggested: “If the manual is with Guo Zhong, then Li Yuan would have proposed marriage to Guo Xiu’er.”

Straightening her beautiful posture, Ji Yanran proudly proclaimed: “If I make Li Yuan give up hope, he will marry her straight away”

It finally dawned on Xiang Shaolong. For a top quality beauty like Guo Xiu’er, there would be no lack of suitors. The only issue is the status in society.

Guo Zhong will never let his daughter marry down and even much less of becoming a concubine.

Ji Yanran holds a more prestigious status than Guo Xiu’er. If Li Yuan won her heart, she would be his official wife. If Li Yuan sealed his marriage with Guo Xiu’er, Ji Yanran will never marry him. This is precisely his present dilemma.

Recalling earlier events, she suspiciously judged: “I think hubby is better than Lu Gong. Even Lu Ban may not be able to design the first class climbing tools you possess.”

Xiang Shaolong felt guilty and shared a passionate kiss with Ji Yanran. Using an excuse to visit the injured Xiang Shaolong, Wu Zhuo arrived with a huge force.

After Ji Yanran left in the most reluctant manner, Wu Zhuo, Jing Jun, Wu Guo and Shan Rou gathered in a secret room for a discussion. Zhao Zhi also came early and entered the room with the rest.

After they are settled in their seats, Xiang Shaolong jested: "If Le Cheng lost his head to a band of masked fighters tonight, who will the public will speculate the killers to be?" Everyone shook with excitement and stared at him with bewilderment.

His actions are beyond comprehension.

Shan Rou and Zhao Zhi cried: "Ah!"

Zhao Zhi reached out and grabbed Shan Rou's hands tightly, her eyes reddened with emotion.

Jing Jun was puzzled: "Does two sister-in-laws have an enmity with Le Cheng?" Xiang Shaolong sighed to himself. Le Cheng is Zhao Mu's right hand man. How can he not play a part in Zhao Mu's devious schemes?

Zhao Zhi heard this kid addressing him as sister-in-law sincerely and was pleased. She took a quick glance and him before lowering her embarrassed face.

Shan Rou put on a satisfied look with her "sister in law" title. Her eyes flashed and recalled: "The person who came to arrest my family is indeed Le Cheng, he even... Ai!" She sadly lowered her head and announced: "I wish to stop bringing up the past!" Suddenly, she raised her head. Gritting her teeth, she swore: "I must cut down his head personally." Wu Zhuo seriously questioned: "Does third brother really has confidence? Le Cheng is a crafty and cowardly character. He is heavily protected by able fighters at all times. Now that the city is in a state of alert, it will make the task much harder."

Full of confidence, Xiang Shaolong said: “If you can do what others cannot, life is more interesting. Assassination is based on strategy, not numbers. If we can accurately understand his movement, we can devise a brilliant operation that will enable us to make a silent attack and retreat.”

Wu Zhuo is still hesitant and added: “Would this raise the alarm and reveal out whereabouts in Handan City?” “Coward!” Shan Rou despicingly scolded.

Wu Zhuo’s face darkened. He is a proud warrior and cannot tolerate such words at him, moreover the person who said it was a female. Zhao Zhi was horrified and tugged at Shan Rou’s shoulders with blame.

Upset, Xiang Shaolong roared: “I respect Big Brother Wu the most! You crossed your line of authority, apologise now!”

Shan Rou knew she was too much but she gave a meek laugh and corrected: “I am not talking about Big Brother Wu. I saw Little Jun trembling and scolded him for being a coward, causing the misunderstanding.”

Jing Jun eyes widened and was about to protest that he was wronged. Catching Zhao Zhi’s wink, he could only keep quiet and took the blame for Shan Rou.

How can Wu Zhuo hold it against her? For Shan Rou case, this is as good as an apology. Shaking his head, he could only clarify: “I am never one to shy from danger. I only wish to emphasize on the important issues and make sure that we do not be penny wise and pound foolish.”

Jing Jun place a lot of importance in family relations. He helped to speak up for Shan Rou: “I am truly the coward. Big Brother Wu is courageous and majestic. He is fearless in the most fearful situation.”

Everyone is amused by his exaggeration and the atmosphere lightened up.

Xiang Shaolong analyzed: “Le Cheng is a dangerous man. If he acts, we can be annihilated. The big question is where his loyalty lies. Is he still loyal to Zhao Mu or has he been bought over by King Xiaocheng? Most likely he is only true to himself. Like the grass on the wall, it will bend towards whichever strong wind that it blowing.”

While waiting for them to digest his words, he continued: “If Zhao Mu wants to rebel tomorrow, he will expose our relationship with him to Le Cheng to increase his confidence. This will make it easier to deploy his men but it will be very dangerous at the same time. Do you understand my meaning?” Shan Rou, Zhao Zhi, Wu Guo and Jing Jun frowned deeply, not being able to catch the underlying meaning. Only Wu Zhuo let out a lasting sigh and agreed: “Yes! I understand why Le Cheng has to be killed first. If he happens to be King Xiaocheng’s spy in Zhao Mu camp, he will pass on the secret to King Xiaocheng and we will die without even knowing why.”

Shan Rou was hit with realization.

Xiang Shaolong smilingly added: “Killing Le Cheng brings us another benefit.”

Even Wu Zhuo cannot see where the benefit lays.

Xiang Shaolong explained plainly: “We will make the assassination as ambiguous as possible. We will create a scenario whereby it seems to be done by Xiang Shaolong but after careful thinking, it may not be done by him. Based on Le Cheng’s wavering allegiance, this will stir up suspicions between Zhao Mu and King Xiaocheng. Both will suspect each other of killing Le Cheng in Xiang Shaolong’s name. What will be the end result?” Everyone was blown away by the brilliance in this plan and admired his throughout analysis.

Jing Jun deduced: “Both men are suspicious by nature. They will start arming themselves for a head on confrontation.”

Nodding, Wu Zhuo visualised: “It would be best if King Xiaocheng summoned Lian Po or Li Mu back for his protection and assistance. This will provoke Zhao Mu into immediate rebellion. We can then take this opportunity to fish Zhao Mu this big fish in troubled waters.”

Shan Rou frowned: “Then the biggest challenge is how to cut off Le Cheng’s head?” Xiang Shaolong was ticked and was about to answer when an attendant reported that Tian Dan is here to visit him.

Xiang Shaolong was alarmed.

Within Handan City, the man whom he has the most misgivings is Tian Dan.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Opportunity to kill at night**

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Tian Dan entered his bedroom and on his left and right is his bodyguard Liu Zhong Xia and Liu Zhong Shi brothers. He walked straight to the bedside and intimately asked: “How is Brother Dong doing?” Tian Dan has a natural dominating spirit and Xiang Shaolong raised his awareness and monitored his words carefully. Nodding to him as a gesture of acknowledgement, he replied: “I am up to my neck in work and is also enjoying the pleasures of wine and women. After a little soak in the river, I caught this resulting fever. Ai! Chancellor Tian, please have a seat!”

Tian Dan smiled and corrected: “I love to talk while standing. Hei! Brother Dong’s eyes are full of energy, how can you be immersed in women? You must have over exert physically and purposely caught a chill!”

Xiang Shaolong knew he cannot pretend in front of this man. He grumbled: “I guess so!”

Scrutinizing him for a while, Tian Dan simply asked: “Are Brother Dong’s followers all personally trained by you?” From his words, Xiang Shaolong deduced that when he was trying to force his way at the city gates with King Xiaocheng dissuading him, Tian Dan must have been present and observed the entire situation. He was alarmed that Tian Dan is now suspicious of him. He pretend to be unaffected and answered: “To raise horses, you must first prevent your horses from being stolen. The south is full of barbarians so I

trained them every day to prepare for this threat.”

After a moment’s thought, Tian Dan nodded: “If Brother Dong can train my Qi soldiers to be as elite and unafraid of death like yours, Qin would not pose a threat.” Xiang Shaolong relaxed as Tian Dan is only identifying his real strength and he admired his foresight.

His biggest strength lies in bringing the special forces concept into this ancient age.

And this strength was identified by Tian Dan in an instance.

After exchanging looks, Xiang Shaolong closed his eyes for a while before opening them again. Looking straight at Tian Dan’s suspicious gaze, he shot: “I understand your intentions. Chancellor Tian, please give Mister some time.” Tian Dan was amazed by his forthright and direct answer. Stunned, he joyfully praised: “I acknowledge Brother Dong as a sentimental man with strong emotions. Otherwise, you would not have risked your life saving Lord Longyang. If it was anyone else, they would save their own skin first.”

Xiang Shaolong pretended to be under some pain and his eyebrows frowned. Shaking his head, he said: “My mind is blank at the point in time. All I know is we are on the same boat and should face danger together.”

Tian Dan eyes shone and he asked in a deep voice: “According to Lord Longyang, Brother Dong had a premonition of the incoming danger. How did Brother Dong foretell the future?”

Under his penetrating gaze, Xiang Shaolong was very uncomfortable and

wished he could leave immediately. Pretending to be tired, he simply answered: "I have been with horses longer than anyone. I may have picked up their sensitivity to surroundings. Before every natural disaster or extreme change in weather, all birds, animals and insects are known to exhibit strange behaviour."

After all, Xiang Shaolong is not a criminal. He cannot interrogate him nonstop.

Tian Dan commented: "Brother Dong is an extraordinary talent. The assassin must have been very unlucky to run into Brother Dong, resulting in his failure. The Chu King may have overlooked your capabilities but how would Lord Chunshen Huang He (Zhao Mu's dad, Li Yuan's master) let you go?"

Xiang Shaolong was shaken. This man possesses the highest intellect. If he is let slips any detail, he may be blackmailed by him. He joked: "Lord Chunshen may not even remember how I look; what is there not to let go? I am tired of the Chu people and have no wish to bring them up anymore."

It is Tian Dan's turn to admire Xiang Shaolong's prowess. His ambiguous reply makes him even more mysterious and intelligent. Nodding, he agreed: "The people of Chu are short sighted and only look for short term gains. They refuse to learn from their mistakes and are not worth mentioning. But if Chu is led by Li Yuan one day, what are the changes Brother Dong can foresee?" Xiang Shaolong gave a cold snort and hissed: "Li Yuan is a ungrateful and narrow-minded brat. He indulges in wine and women and got his position through dubious means. What can he possibly accomplish?" Electricity seemed to shoot out from Tian Dan's eyes and land squarely on his face. He

could not help laughing: “Brother Dong is truly someone of great judgement; how can I believe you are just an ordinary horse breeder!”

Xiang Shaolong’s entire spine is freezing cold. Giving a dry cough, he humbly said: “Chancellor Tian is exaggerating.”

Tian Dan officially said: “If Brother Dong knows the ways of the world, he should not remain in this declining state of Zhao. He should have better aspirations and set his sights high and far. Brother Dong is a smart man and should understand what I mean.”

Xiang Shaolong knows that he is naturally referring to himself. He felt great relief and eased himself on his pillow. He released a huge sigh and kept his silence.

Tian Dan may be eloquent and highly persuasive but he is still helpless at Xiang Shaolong’s silence. Giving in, he implored: “What is holding Brother Dong’s tongue?” Xiang Shaolong pretending to be in discomfort and forced himself to sit up. He supported himself by the bed rest and cried: “It is my dad’s dying wishes that I return to Zhao to farm animals. Everything is fated and I usually don’t give a d@mn about things. Chancellor Tian and I have a great affinity for each other and I am thankful for our acquaintance. I need time to ponder this over and I hope Chancellor Tian can appreciate my predicament.”

He is so blunt that Tian Dan can no longer force him to make a stand. He took a deep breath and surprisingly shot: “The assassin is not related to Xiang Shaolong!”

Xiang Shaolong was startled. Acting stupid, he asked: "How did Chancellor Tian know?" Tian Dan stepped forward by a step and patted his shoulder lightly. He smiled: "I wish for a day when Brother Dong will visit me in Qi. I will give Mister the grandest treatment. Please rest well! When you recover in a few days, I hope to tour your farm."

Evading Xiang Shaolong's question and leaving like that, Tian Dan got Xiang Shaolong filled with questions about what he has accomplished in such a visit.

At dinnertime, everyone is heavily burdened about the upcoming assassination and atmosphere is very depressing.

Zhao Zhi took a few bites and laid down her chopsticks, watching Xiang Shaolong eating with a good appetite.

Jing Jun is the only excited individual. He egged Zhao Zhi: "Sister Zhi! If you are not full, you will not have energy!" Zhao Zhi quietly replied: "I am not hungry!"

Shan Rou scolded softly: "Useless girl. We are not the victims so why are you so nervous!" At this moment, Tian Zhen and Tian Feng came over to pour wine for everyone. Wu Zhuo halted: "No drinking tonight!" He turned to Xiang Shaolong and laughed: "Lord Longyang sent two big caskets of wine. One is medicated wine; the other is tonic wine. Ha! I think third brother is in for a good time."

Xiang Shaolong is troubled with Lord Longyang's gratitude and concern and

could not say a word. Shan Rou coldly snorted: “Letting him die would be a clean break. You had to go and save his life and got into a whole bunch of nonsense.”

Irritated, Zhao Zhi chided: “Sister!”

Shan Rou shot her a look and demeaned: “You are only good as a noisemaker.”

Xiang Shaolong could only face Wu Zhuo and Jing Jun and smiled.

Shan Rou patted her little tummy and stretched her body. In a hoarse and harsh voice, she demanded: “I want a piece of the action tonight. Your wife is going for a quick nap. You better prepare a set of those climbing tools for me. I want the best quality.”

Everyone was dazzled by her mannerisms. She headed back to sleep as she said and one of the Tian sisters hastily escorted her back.

Zhao Zhi was shaking as she tried to apologise: “Dear Masters have a broad mind to fit your status. Please do not blame Sister Rou. She...” Xiang Shaolong laughing interrupted: “Zhi Zhi rest easy. No one will really blame her.”

Wu Zhuo nodded in agreement: “Definitely an experienced first class assassin. She knows that it is crucial to rest and relax before any action. We must learn from her.” At this time, Wu Guo led Pu Bu and his buddy Liu Chao in. Waiting for their news in agony, everyone was elated to see them.

After pouring out his sorrows over their earlier parting, Liu Chao started speaking: "After I got word from Pu Bu, I instantly contacted my colleagues who are deployed in Le Cheng's residence. After some investigations, we finally got something conclusive."

Everyone cheered and listened attentively.

Liu Chao explained: "Le Cheng is a very cautious person. He committed all sorts of atrocities and is afraid of revenge. His movement are highly confidential and is always surrounded by a large group of well-trained warriors. Even now, we have yet to penetrate his circle of trusted escorts." Jing Jun was distressed: "I thought you said we have something conclusive?" Liu Chao explained: "That is normally the case. However, Handan City is in a state of panic for the past two days. Le Cheng deployed a huge number of house guards into his escort team, so we have two brothers who managed to slip in. Otherwise, I would not dare to come and see Master Xiang."

Xiang Shaolong frowned: "He seems to be afraid of me!"

Liu Chao stressed: "Master Xiang and him have deep grudges. Of course he wants to stay alive!"

Xiang Shaolong is surprised. He asked: "We have deep grudges?" Liu Chao was alarmed: "What! Does Master Xiang not know that Shu'er is gang r@ped by Zhao Mu and him till death? He even tells us how he did it and he enjoyed playing with Master Xiang's woman."

"What!" Xiang Shaolong was shaking strongly. Afraid that he may be too

emotional, Wu Zhuo coaxed him and asked Liu Chao: “Where will Le Cheng be tonight?” Liu Chao replied: “For the sake of the city’s defence, he has spent most of his time in the east gate command post. He is rarely home in the last few days and couldn’t wait to return to his residence.”

Xiang Shaolong suppressed his grief but recollecting Shu’er’s horrifying death, warm blood filled him. In a deep voice, he asked: “What is he afraid of?”

Liu Chao responded: “Madam Le is King Xiaocheng’s sister, Zhao Ya’s elder sister. She is a very smart woman and Le Cheng is afraid of her. All his sexual activities have to be hidden from her.”

Zhao Zhi worriedly said: “If he remained in the command post tonight, what chances do we have?” Liu Chao added: “He has three other villas which he use to house any new girls or concubines. This man is cruel and loves under@ge girls. The girls he tortured till death or disability are beyond calculation. Recently, an official offended King Xiaocheng and Le Cheng was tasked to annihilate his clan. He secretly kept two concubines for his own pleasure. He has yet to visit them recently so we gauged that he will do so within these two nights.”

Xiang Shaolong finally understood why Empress Zhu Ji (Qin, Xiao Pan’s new mother) bore such hatred towards Le Cheng. Now, even without her command, he will never let him off.

Wu Zhuo continued to clarify everything he needed to know about Le Cheng, including the location of the villa used to hide the women. He also asked

about Le Cheng's personal escort team and other details. Liu Chao replied all his questions in concise details. After he finished, Wu Zhuo praised him to Xiang Shaolong: "Brother Liu is a talent and has never stop working for you."

Liu Chao modestly replied: "After the visit from Daliang, our band of brothers is willing to lay our lives for Master Xiang anytime. In our opinion, there is not one hero who can match Master Xiang."

Xiang Shaolong recomposed himself and nodded: "After this incident, please come back to Xianyang with me! We will share wealth and woe together and be united as one family."

Li Chao was overjoyed and gave his thanks.

Xiang Shaolong sent him out personally and reminded him to tell his two brothers in the personal escort team to find an excuse not to depart with Le Cheng before returning to the inner hall.

Wu Zhuo and the rest had left to prepare for tonight's operations, leaving only Zhao Zhi and the beautiful pair of twins from Yue.

Xiang Shaolong had calmed down when he thought about the dead Shu'er. He felt like his heart was being stabbed and was in agony.

On his return to Handan City, he has been on the receiving end of Le Cheng's hospitality. Despite knowing it is all a false front, there had been no real sense of enmity. Now that things have changed and he wanted to tear this traitor to pieces. His death will only bring benefits to humanity.

The only issue Xiang Shaolong had with this ancient time is that women are treated like playthings or slaves. Even a Princess like Zhao Ya is also dependent on making men happy for her survival.

A person's authority should arise from an objective and fair legal system. Thinking about this, he remembered the fathers of Legalism Li Si and Han Fei Zi. He wonders if he can influence them to replace Legalism instead of Confucian governance.

After he thought deeper, he realised that as long as it is still a monarchy, real Legalism is just a reflection in the water. A reflection only and never the real thing.

Zhao Zhi slide up to him and tugged: "Master Dong! Your face is really pale and I am worried for you."

Xiang Shaolong was stricken. In this state, he is not suited to lead the assassination. But he is unable to release his agitation for Shu'er.

Reaching out and hugging Zhao Zhi's waist, he coaxed: "Zhi Zhi must stay here tonight and await my return."

Zhao Zhi thundered: "Ah! No! I must be by your side, don't look down on my swordsmanship." Xiang Shaolong lowered his hand and patted her buttocks strongly. He officially state: "Your martial arts and swordsmanship are brilliant but you have never drawn blood before. This is a different matter altogether. Be obedient and listen to me, ok?" Thinking about killing, Zhao Zhi gave a cold consent and lowered her head in silence.

Xiang Shaolong suddenly thought of a great way to relax. He intimately whispered besides her small ear: “Zhi Zhi you wait for me in my room. I do not want to see a piece of clothing on you. I will come and make love to you in a while; did you hear what I said?” Happy but shy, Zhao Zhi tinkled a sweet reply before she tore away from him and ran straight into his room, not daring to look back at him.

The Tian sisters stared at them unknowingly.

Xiang Shaolong summoned the two girls before him. Hugging one on each side, he proclaimed harmoniously: “Tomorrow night is your turn!”

Sometime after the second watch.

The east gate command post’s giant doors opened and out galloped two hundred over riders. In formation, they started travelling on the long street. They swerved left and entered an express lane which is part of the city wall and begin cruising.

Except for four lanterns in front and the four behind lighting the path, the centre formation travelled in total darkness, causing anyone to be unable to see clearly who is riding.

Two rows of forty riders formed a long line and they rode on the edge of the formation, one after another. They resemble a moving wall safeguarding the five groups of riders in the centre. Everyone is holding onto a large shield and is facing externally. If someone were to shoot an assassinating arrow from the houses or the streets, they are likely to miss them, much less the riders in

the centre.

The centre group of riders has the most soldiers, numbering fifty. Those at the perimeter all carried tall shields, showing that there is an important person in the centre.

The remaining four groups have twenty soldiers each. They carry a long lance each and are ready to charge or use them as a throwing weapon.

Under the sickly autumn wind, one can feel the strict chill in the air.

The hoof beats shattered the tranquillity of the late night.

There are thirty over feet between each group. Even in the case of an ambush, it is hard to surround them unless the enemy has a force ten times larger. After riding for half a mile, the formation left with express lane and swerved right towards the city.

The sky is thick with clouds, hiding the moon.

The elite members trailing them quickly climbed onto higher buildings and out of sight from the formation. They signalled their nearest teammate and pinpointed Le Cheng's position.

Waiting anxiously at Le Cheng's alternative villa, Xiang Shaolong and company swiftly plotted out their travel route and laid their ambush.

Xiang Shaolong and his troops flattened themselves on roofs. Their head and

faces are all securely covered with black cloth. Only their eyes are showing, resembling ghosts. Until they saw the faint light from the lanterns appearing at the far end of the street did they finally put their mind at ease.

If Le Cheng did not use this direction to return to his alternative villa, tonight's operation would have gone to waste.

As the hoof beats sounded, the prey draws nearer.

On the left Wu Zhuo analyzed: "Le Cheng may be a cruel child predator but he still holds water as Zhao's famed general. Looking at his formation, we can tell that he is well qualified."

On the right Shan Rou whispered: "Le Cheng is mine. I must cut his head personally."

Xiang Shaolong purposely twisted over and bit her ear softly before adding: "This is a city hunt. Whoever has the best ability will receive the biggest gains."

Shan Rou shot him an icy look and bend her head with disdain. Her body remained still though.

Xiang Shaolong is high with anticipation.

Right now, the lantern bearers in front have arrived at their ambush point and pass them.

Group after group of enemies rode along the long street. The atmosphere becoming more and more tense.

Xiang Shaolong knows that the time is ripe. He nudged Wu Zhuo as the biggest group of riders with Le Cheng in it entered the heart of the narrow lane below him.

Wu Zhuo let out a shrill whistle, breaking the orderly hoof beats.

The enemy is taken by surprised and looked at the two sides.

The air is filled with the sound of arrows whizzing by. Prone on the two rows of roofs, the elite troops shot out arrow after arrow, killing the horses but not the men.

The war horses' tragic cries and the angry howls of men filled everybody's ears.

The lanterns have been taken out. In the darkness, the war horses jumped wildly and it was chaos.

But the formation remained intact and this is enough to prove the Zhao army has strict training and quality soldiers.

Wu Zhuo knows that the time is appropriate and give the signal to attack.

Xiang Shaolong remained still but Shan Rou had leaped from the roof like a leopard. She dropped a few feet before she shot a cable from her climbing

tool at her waist. Like heavenly soldiers descending, she landed on an empty area on the street.

In the same instant, over ten burning fireballs erupted from left and right, vaguely illuminating the enemy's position. The enemy still imagined the attackers are from the two sides. Unknown to them, the attackers have all climbed up.

The elite troops used their flying daggers to deadly perfection. By the time the enemy realised, over half of the formation has been wounded and fallen from their horses. The complete formation is now in disarray.

The rider-less horses started bumping around, adding to the chaos.

Since Le Cheng's group is the main target, it suffered the most casualties. Fifty over men are down to nearly twenty. The remaining survivors continue falling off their horses.

Those hit by flying daggers are wounded on the face or the chest, transforming this peaceful long street into a living hell of corpses and carcasses.

Xiang Shaolong used his waist cable and descends onto the street.

Before his foot touch the ground, he sent out two palms on his right and left. Unable to feint, two enemies on horseback received the palm on the face and fell off their horses. When he landed, Blood wave was drawn out and he killed two of his three attackers. The last man was stabbed by Shan Rou from

the back and tragically yelled before falling towards Xiang Shaolong.

Xiang Shaolong stepped aside and scanned the area. The fireballs are still burning on the floor and ten over personal escorts are shielding the calm-looking Le Cheng as they retreated to a back alley.

With shouts of “Kill” ringing the street, the elite soldiers leaped out from both sides. Carrying giant axes, they slayed the remaining foes and left Le Cheng’s group alone without support.

Xiang Shaolong winked at Wu Zhuo, leading four of their troops for the kill.

Like a tigress breaking free, Shan Rou rushed to their backs and shot out a flying dagger. She shot later but she hit the target first. Before Xiang Shaolong and Wu Zhuo make a kill, the dagger hit the throat of an enemy, proving her assassination skills.

Le Cheng roared: “Attack!”

Five men advanced to meet Xiang Shaolong and Wu Zhuo while he continues to retreat.

Xiang Shaolong shouted: “Le Cheng you traitor, let me Xiang Shaolong take your worthless life!”

Le Cheng has entered the back alley. Confident, he grinned: “Come if you dare!”

Shan Rou dashed past Xiang Shaolong, her sword waving ferociously, engaging the enemy before he could.

Xiang Shaolong and Wu Zhuo were afraid that she may fail and quickly attacked. The swords and sabres flashed and the aura of death was all around.

These men are Le Cheng's best swordsmen and they defended their attacks well.

Le Cheng was about to turn and run into other alleys when his bodyguards were felled by arrows.

Leading more men, Jing Jun jumped down from the roof and forced Le Cheng and his troops to panic and head back to the main street.

Those in front can no longer hold back and start falling into their own pool of blood. Helplessly, Le Cheng commanded: "Come with me!"

The remaining six men accompanied him back to where Xiang Shaolong was.

Le Cheng let out a howl and drew his own sword. Fast as lightning, he exchanged three stances with Xiang Shaolong in an instant.

His arm strength is not as strong as Xiang Shaolong. In the last strike, he lost his balance and retreated three steps. Killing the rest of the enemy, Jing Jun somersaulted and sent two flying legs to Le Cheng's back. "Piak!" Both feet hit Le Cheng at the same time and on the same level as his heart.

Le Cheng staggered and fell forward, his helmet landing on the floor.

A sword flashed. Having just killed another enemy, Shan Rou pounced out from nowhere and overtook Xiang Shaolong. In a cry of triumph, Le Cheng's head dropped onto the floor. Decapitated, he died tragically on the spot.

Wu Zhou held up the lifeless head and gave the order to retreat.

The cables hanging from the roofs were retrieved, leaving no evidence.

The entire operation, taking less effort than to boil a cup of tea, completely highlights the highly efficient and explosive attacking power of the elite forces.

Other than the strong flames, the floor is littered with carcasses and the blood soaked corpses of the Zhao soldiers.

## Chapter 4

### The new city commander

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Zhao Mu came to talk to Xiang Shaolong in the earliest hours of daylight. His eyes were lined with red veins and were flashing with uncertainty. Obviously, he has lost his footing.

Xiang Shaolong is still in bed. Half-conscious, he struggled to stay awake. Holding his blanket, he enquired: "Why is Marquis's complexion worse than myself?" Zhao Mu sat on his bed side was deep in thought. Finally, he replied in a deep voice: "How are your injuries?" Xiang Shaolong pretended to move his limbs with difficulty and act tough. He gave a bored answer: "It is just superficial wounds but I caught a bad chill. After lying for a whole day and night I am feeling much better."

Zhao Mu did not find anything suspicious. In fact, all those who survived Lord Longyang assassination are still bedridden. It would be strange if only Xiang Shaolong is walking around full of energy.

"Ai!" Zhao Mu cried. "Le Cheng ran into trouble last night!"

Shaken, Xiang Shaolong exclaimed: "What!?" Looking at Xiang Shaolong's eyes wide open, Zhao Mu added: "Le Cheng was assassinated on his way home last night. Even his head was chopped off. Two hundred over personal armed escorts were either dead or heavily injured. Ai!"

Aghast, Xiang Shaolong questioned: “That Xiang Shaolong is really so powerful?” Zhao Mu coldly said: “The residents of the neighbouring houses did hear someone saying he is Xiang Shaolong himself. But all these attackers are masked and no one can really be sure of their identity. After further investigations, we discovered another batch of soldiers was killed at the east wall, leaving only their climbing ropes. We did not find any footprints outside the city wall though.”

Energized, Xiang Shaolong concluded: “In this case, Xiang Shaolong must be hiding in the city. Marquis must dig him out quickly.”

Zhao Mu angrily shot back: “Do I need you to teach me to do this? The entire Handan City has been flipped over. Unless Xiang Shaolong and his men can burrow underground like rats, they will leave some traces. But we have yet to even detect his shadow. Can you explain to me what he is going on?” Zhao Mu was in a bad mood and lost his usual courtesy towards this Dong Horse Fanatic.

Xiang Shaolong was laughing inside. Faking a thinking face, he asked after a while: “Who will be the new commander?” Zhao Mu responded: “Based on the current situation, it will be Cheng Dan!”

His face changing colours, Xiang Shaolong mused: “This is bad for us.”

Zhao Mu recovered: “You finally understand. Le Cheng’s death only benefits King Xiaocheng and not Xiang Shaolong. If Xiang Shaolong wants to kill, it will be long before Le Cheng’s turn. King Xiaocheng has always been cruel. It could even be Zhao Ya’s instigation. If Xiang Shaolong can really come and go

as he wishes, King Xiaocheng and I will be dead long ago.”

Biting his teeth, Xiang Shaolong proposed: “The first mover gains the advantage. If Marquis can poison him through Zhao Queen, this will solve all our problems.” Zhao Mu bitterly replied: “Do you think she is my subordinate? She will not be so stupid to be directly involved in the assassination. But if we manage to kill that muddle-headed King Xiaocheng, I have a way to control her. Ai! What should I do now?” Xiang Shaolong was delighted to comprehend the relationship between Zhao Mu and Zhao Queen – they were only making use of each other.

Zhao Mu saw that Xiang Shaolong is keeping very quiet and thought he is thinking about how to save them. He released a very long sigh before summarizing: “Some things cannot be rushed. It is my great fortune to have a nameless superman like you so I am not defeated yet. But without Le Cheng, my power will diminish greatly and Tian Dan will not be as friendly as usual.”

Standing up, he finished “Rest well and heal your injuries first! I still have to visit other people and calm their nerves. You try to gather more news from Zhao Ya and see what other moves King Xiaocheng is planning.”

Xiang Shaolong advised: “Marquis, please be careful of people changing sides. The mind is unfathomable. Things are not as easy as they always seem!”

Displeased, Zhao Mu said: “How can I not know this? I will contact you in the future.”

After he left, Xiang Shaolong remained in bed and was filled with thoughts.

When the Tian sisters came in and helped him to wash up, Shan Rou skipped in energetically like a little girl. Grinning, she approached his back and used her shoulder to knock him lightly and proudly asked: "Who killed the biggest tiger?" "Another tigress, I admit my inferiority" came Xiang Shaolong's irritated reply. He reached behind and held her closely against his own back, giving him much excitement.

Shan Rou was in her best mood and did not resist his molest. She curiously mentioned: "We only have ten over injuries; This is indeed miraculously. Nobody will believe even if we say it. Why not we kill Tian Dan as well, then I will do whatever you wish. Zhao Zhi and I can be another pair of Tian sisters."

Both Tian sisters turned red-faced.

Xiang Shaolong could feel a headache coming. Changing the topic, he asked: "Where is your nice sister?" Shan Rou broke free from his back embrace and chirped: "Don't change the topic! What kind of hero are you?" As she was combing his hair, Tian Zhen softly mentioned: "Miss Zhi is out gathering news. Aiyah!" She was pinched by Shan Rou.

Xiang Shaolong turned around and folded his sleeves shouting: "This is the first time I have seen such an unreasonable woman. Let me use my wild-horse-taming skill on you shrew!"

Jutting out her chest, Shan Rou faced him with her almond shaped eyes challenged: "You dare!"

Tian Zhen and Tian Feng knew that he is putting up a show and held their laughter while peeping.

Xiang Shaolong used his large palm and poked her face. Before she could retaliate, he withdrew and joked: "Sister has improved; now she only uses her hands and not her daggers."

Shan Rou giggled and bats her eyelid at him, showcasing her charm and adorability. Xiang Shaolong was aroused and wanted to give her a bear hug but Shan Rou slipped out of his grasp. Sliding to the door, she smiled departing: "You have not skilled enough to gain my favour. Go home and train for a few more years!" She disappeared laughing but the tinkle of her laughter remains in the air.

Xiang Shaolong was mad and gnashed his teeth. Tian Feng smilingly commented: "Miss Rou does carry a torch for Master Dong. She often chats with us about you."

Embracing their two waists, Xiang Shaolong softly asked: "What about the both of you?" Both girls squirmed in embarrassment and lowered their heads.

The two similar looking girls with two different attitudes have reignited the desire started by Shan Rou in Xiang Shaolong. Assessing that Handan City will be in mayhem today and that all his sick visitors have come, he would have plenty of free time today. If he did not enjoy his jade beauties, there would be no better time.

Minds and bodies as one, the chamber is filled passion.

The long awaited rewards for these two beauties were finally bestowed to them in this beautiful moment.

When Xiang Shaolong woke up, Tian Zhen and Tian Feng's enticing bodies are intertwined with his like an octopus securing its prey. A slight movement by him cause the two exceedingly charming sisters to awake in fright.

Both girls looked outside the window and saw the break of dawn. Startled, they stumbled out of bed.

Xiang Shaolong was overwhelmed by physical scrambling of the sisters jade bodies. He nearly wanted to pull them back into bed but recalling Handan's situation, he forced himself to get out of bed too.

The two girls were delighted to wash up and change for him.

Happiness and joy shone out of their faces, making Xiang Shaolong delirious. His hands worked non-stop like them, causing both girls' ears to turn deep red before he left.

The main hall was totally quiet and no one can be seen.

Xiang Shaolong was enjoying the rare tranquillity. Feeling lazy, he abandoned all thoughts and walked over to a sofa and lied down.

Tian Zhen was tidying some clothes when she swayed over and kneeled

down beside him. In a crystal clear voice, she asked: "What does Master Dong long to eat? I will prepare it for you."

Reminded by her words, his stomach rumbled like a drum. Patting her face, he replied: "Anything is fine! Hei! Where has that tigress gone to?"

Tian Zhen could not resist replying: "The tigress is naturally sleeping in the tiger den in daytime. Little Feng is attending to her." Finished, she left cheerfully.

Xiang Shaolong closed his eyes and pretended to be asleep when Jing Jun and Zhao Zhi returned one after another. Neither of them brought back any negative reports. Xiang Shaolong could finally see the clouds clearing and put down a burden on his mind.

With Le Cheng gone, the stakes have changed and he now holds the initiative.

As Jing Jun and Zhao Zhi ate with him, Zhao Zhi commented: "I have never seen Handan City in such a state. The streets are full of soldiers and every household is being searched and interrogated. Even all our martial warriors at the school have been despatched to help out, causing widespread panic."

As Xiang Shaolong stuffed himself, he asked: "Did anyone suspect it was my work?" Looking at him with utmost admiration and worship, she chuckled: "Master Dong is famous for his flying needles. Because none were used, everyone is highly suspicious. Zhao Ba even suspects the mastermind to be Li Yuan. Hei! This is so funny!"

Jing Jun added: "I have never seen Sister Zhi so happy before."

Zhao Zhi shot him a glare and cried: "Busybody!"

Jing Jun quickly smilingly apologised.

This is called everything has its relationship with one another, Xiang Shaolong thought. "Where is big brother?" he asked. Jing Jun answered: "He is back at the farm." Lowering his voice, he added: "Now that the Zhao soldiers are searching the population, we should take the chance to send the injured brothers back to the farm for healing and cover a potential loophole."

Xiang Shaolong was relieved.

Wu Zhuo is clever and cautious and will have a good excuse.

Jing Jun continued: "Big brother had wanted to speak to third brother but third brother ... Hei!"

Zhao Zhi stared and questioned: "Why are you stuttering, Little Jun? What is wrong is third brother?" Xiang Shaolong is unafraid of Zhao Zhi. His hand snaked under the table and began to feel her thigh. This appealing beauty instantly kept quiet and lowered her head.

Tian Feng walked out of the kitchen, holding a huge jar of wine. She asked: "Does Master Dong want to try Lord Longyang's tonic wine?" Jing Jun clapped and yelled: "This is what he needs right now! You should join us for a drink too."

Both girls' petite faces start to become hot.

Xiang Shaolong found the situation very ironic. He whistled: "Unless you are too weak to absorb the nutrients, every man needs this stuff. Come! Get Zhen Zhen to join us too and let's celebrate."

Time passes by in this happy setting.

In the evening, a fresh Shan Rou left her bedroom and dragged Zhao Zhi to the backyard and prayed to their departed parents.

Jing Jun loved excitement. Leading ten over experts, he went out to spy but was actually out to party.

Xiang Shaolong did not stop him as he agrees that it will give them more knowledge about Handan City's current affairs.

He was pining for Ji Yanran but knows that he must stay indoors. The only way to suppress this yearning was to seek out Tian Zhen and Tian Feng, pleasuring them to the maximum.

All the other men only love their bodies; who is willing to share their sorrows?

Zhao Zhi is unofficially his mistress and moved in as well. He could not bear to contradict her action. After dinner, he was intended on a quiet night when there was a sudden visitor – it is Marquis Pingshan Han Chuang.

Sitting in the hall, Han Chuang scrutinized his complexion and nodded: “Brother Dong is fitter than his horses. Your complexion has improved so much. Does the wound still hurt?” “Thanks for Marquis’s concern. I am indeed much better today. Ai! General Le Cheng left so unexpectedly.”

Han Chuang revealed a cold air and spoke with disdain: “There are some people in this world that can die suddenly and no one can guess who the murderer is. This is because they have harmed too many people. If I may, I would love to stab him myself. In the past when he was guarding the Zhao-Han border, he often trespassed my area and committed atrocities. Both his hands are full of blood. Humph!”

Xiang Shaolong was mortified. He normally saw Han Chuang and Le Cheng behaving like close brothers but they were hiding these deep grudges. Feigning surprise, he exclaimed: “General Le Cheng is really such a person?” Han Chuang cut in: “Forget this man. Let’s discuss about the future.”

Xiang Shaolong muttered to himself. Does this man want to use me to face off Li Yuan?

Han Chuang received his tea from Tian Feng and lecherously looked at her back frame. Swallowing his saliva, he recomposed himself and described: “On your return to Zhao, you would hope to carve out a prosperous career. Ultimately, horse-breeding is just horse-breeding. The most you can be the next Wu Family. You will never hold an official post, do you understand Brother Dong?” Xiang Shaolong thought to himself – even if I am the real Dong Kuang, I would never go to Han as it is even weaker than Zhao. Putting up a false front, he started: “I am grateful that Marquis recognizes my talent.

But..." Han Chuang interrupted: "Brother Dong is mistaken. If ever you wish to come to my state, I welcome you with open arms. But today's topic is about the vacancy of the City Commander created by Le Cheng's death."

Xiang Shaolong was befuddled. Han Chuang is a Han citizen. When is his turn to meddle with the affairs of Zhao? The City Commander is equivalent to the biggest protector of Zhao King and is someone the Zhao King would trust the most. He would never try to vie for this position even in his dreams.

Han Chuang proudly revealed: "Brother Dong would have never guessed that the Zhao Queen has Han roots. Through her, I am able to influence Zhao politics to a certain extent."

Xiang Shaolong then remembered that Zhao Queen is part of the plan to unite the three states. The Han royalty married to King Xiaocheng would naturally have some connections to Han Chuang. Kicking himself for this oversight, he confessed: "I have no idea at all!"

Han Chuang loftily added: "If I put in a few words for you to Zhao Queen, she can influence King Xiaocheng's decision."

After Zhao Mu's decline in power, Zhao Ya and Zhao Queen are the two people who have the most influence on King Xiaocheng.

Xiang Shaolong was shaken. Like Lord Longyang, he had underestimated Han Chuang. This man is always lusting after Zhao Ya. Besides her body, the more crucial reason is to manipulate King Xiaocheng through her. He can even conquer Zhao without bloodshed. From this point of view, Zhao Mu is at best

a little pawn in the hand of Zhao Queen.

In this warring period, everyone survives by acquiring information. National conspiracies are all executed openly and discreetly.

Frowning, he asked: “Didn’t King Xiaocheng get Cheng Dan to succeed Le Cheng?” Han Chuang scolded angrily: “Who the hell is Cheng Dan? He stole some of Xiang Shaolong’s credit to attain his present position. His prestige and abilities are insufficient to win the hearts and minds of his subordinates. In this urgent situation, he is only temporary assigned to take charge!”

Xiang Shaolong was agitated. If he is the City Commander, capturing Zhao Mu will be the easiest thing on earth. Disbelieving King Xiaocheng’s naivety, he bitterly joked: “I have been in Handan City for a short while only. My seat is not even warm yet and I don’t even qualify in the first place. Marquis need not waste the effort.”

Still highly enthusiastic, Han Chuang encouraged: “Brother Dong is too humble. Everyone in Handan City knows you and your popularity is sky high. From the gift of a thousand war horses, the dissing of the Chu people, the gate-crashing, the saving of Lord Longyang, etc. If you become the City Commander, there will be no one who can offer a better candidate.”

Xiang Shaolong shook his head: “One gate-crashing is not enough to change Zhao King’s opinion.”

Han Chuang smiled craftily and continued: “Black can be twisted to white and white can be twisted to black. All it takes is a mouth. If King Xiaocheng appoints you, it also shows he is open-minded, generous and good at utilising

talents. Brother Dong is all prepared but only lacks the mouth. I can even influence Zhao Ya and have both of them speak up for you. What more is there to worry by then?" Xiang Shaolong is finally blown over and his heart is rejuvenated. He looked at Han Chuang suspiciously and asked: "This act of kindness; what can I do to repay Marquis?" Han Chuang saw that he is tempted and is just as happy. He laughed loudly: "We are all family and there is no need for such words! Come! Let me arrange for you to meet the Queen and we can talk about the rest later." He stood up and turned around.

Xiang Shaolong pretends to get up forcefully and send him to the door. As they walked, Han Chuang advised: "Do not get involved with Zhao Mu or Guo Zhong. At the same time, do not offend Zhao Ya or Guo Kai. This way, the City Commander's position will be yours. Hey! King Xiaocheng is very impressed with your saving of Lord Longyang."

"Has Lord Longyang recovered?" Xiang Shaolong queried. Han Chuang hissed: "If you need one day to recover, he will need at least ten days! Oh! Are the twin sisters thrilling?" How can Xiang Shaolong not understand his intention? Cursing to himself, he whispered: "I can send them to keep you company but we better be discreet and do not let others suspect our relationship. When I am appointed the City Commander, then we will have no fear."

Han Chuang reluctantly sighed: "Brother Dong is right. Better to be discreet. Once I have word from Zhao Queen, I will notify you immediately."

Sending off Han Chuang, Xiang Shaolong wanted to shout out for joy and express the joy and excitement in his heart. Who would have guessed that killing Le Cheng will bring about this wonderful ending?

## Chapter 05

### Stealing the bell while covering the ears

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Xiang Shaolong had yet to turn back to his residence when Zhao Ya's carriage passed Han Chuang's carriage and entered the driveway.

Xiang Shaolong sighed and approached her carriage, opening the door personally.

Zhao Ya simply stared at him and asked softly: "Can you get up and start walking?" Flexing his limbs, he escorted her into the hall and answered: "If I continue to stay in bed, I will be bored to death"

Zhao Ya jested: "You are healthier than Lord Longyang. He is still bedridden. He probably needs another 10 odd days before he recovers completely."

She continued in a low voice: "What did Han Chuang say to you?" Xiang Shaolong did not want her to run into Shan Rou and Zhao Zhi and led her to the east guestroom. Without a care, he said: "Nothing worth mentioning. That lecher saw the twin sisters I had and wanted to borrow them for a night. I turned him away instead. Humph! So what if he is unhappy, I hate this kind of perverts."

His words are half true. It is true that Han Chuang did have that intention. It is untrue as it is not his actual motive. Zhao Ya could not distinguish the truth and nodded in agreement, adding a few words criticising Han Chuang.

Xiang Shaolong was guilt-ridden. Seriously speaking, he is not better off than Han Chuang. He is also the one who snatched the Tian sisters from Zhao Mu. The only difference is that they followed him willingly!

Out of a sudden, Zhao Ya grabbed his arm and led him out of the side door into the garden. As they walked to the pond at the centre of the garden, she whispered: "What is the relationship between Zhao Mu and you? Why did he take special care of you? Why did he look for you so early today morning?" Xiang Shaolong was taken aback. Knowing that she is working for King Xiaocheng, he shrugged his shoulders and insisted: "You ask me; I ask who? I have no need to explain to anyone why someone is treating me well or ill-treating me! I don't give a d@mn."

They reached the poolside and Zhao Ya dragged him to sit down together before laughing: "I love to see your angry look; it is like watching a stubborn child."

Xiang Shaolong pretended to be upset but was very intimidated. Based on her attention to details, his winking at Zhao Mu (during Tian Dan's dinner) could not escape her eyes. He wonders if she has reported this to King Xiaocheng.

Zhao Ya innocently leaned on him. Wrinkling her nose, she complained: "Oh! You are reeking of herbal smells. It is clogging my nose!"

Xiang Shaolong rudely shot: "Nobody asked you to follow me!"

Zhao Ya laughed like a blossoming tree and looks like she is enjoying herself.

Xiang Shaolong was curious: “Your old flame entered the city to commit murder and you can still be carefree and unbothered. Just what in the world is going on?” Zhao Ya smoothly picked a yellow leaf from a short tree and sniffed on it: “This leaf is more fragrant than you.”

Stunned, Xiang Shaolong demanded: “Are you not listening to me?” Zhao Ya’s beautiful gaze floated over. Batting her eye, she replied: “Your voice is so special and full of character. I cannot stop listening even if I want to” Followed by a giggle, she chuckled: “Dong Horse Fanatic is just like the others, thinking that it is Xiang Shaolong who did the killings. The ignorant cannot be blamed. You were not aware of Handan’s affairs so you can only guess blindly.”

Xiang Shaolong was laughing to himself but on the outside, he gnashed his teeth cursing: “Who else can it be that hates Le Cheng so much that he must kill him?”

Zhao Ya leaned even closer with half of her enticing chest resting on his arm. She threw the leaf into the river and looked up to the moon and spoke softly: “Must you hate someone to kill him? If you want to know who may be Le Cheng’s killer, you must first tell me what did Zhao Mu said this morning. Ai! Didn’t you know that I am concerned about you?” Xiang Shaolong bitterly laughed: “You are really concerned about me? I think you are more afraid that I may die and cannot detain the real Xiang Shaolong.”

Zhao Ya’s face reddened and cooed: “I am concerned about both of you! Frank enough? Tell me quick.”

Xiang Shaolong was mesmerized by her tireless spirit and evoked his past happy memories where they often have the usual couple's tiff. Charmed, he was lost in thought.

A smile formed on Zhao Ya's face and she sighed; "You are always in your own world and do not care about me. Handan City is full of danger and any mistake would lead to the annihilation of your entire clan. I cannot protect you and you are still acting angry."

Xiang Shaolong pretended to be perplexed and replied: "He did not tell me any secrets but came to ask me more about Chu. I could tell that the Marquis of Julu was troubled and I guessed he must have been traumatized by the formidable old flame of yours."

After a moment's thought, Zhao Ya faintly said: "This matter should be kept from you but I am afraid that you may get involved with Zhao Mu so I have to force it out from you."

Xiang Shaolong was delighted to know that his guess was accurate. Le Cheng is a two-headed snake whose loyalty is shuffling between King Xiaocheng and Zhao Mu. Both parties will suspect each other to be the mastermind.

Zhao Ya reached to his ear and disclosed: "Zhao Mu is the chief suspect in Le Cheng's death."

Xiang Shaolong feigned shock and cried: "What!?" Zhao Ya stated: "That's all you need to know and do not ask anymore. Ai! Zhao Mu is really stupid, measuring others by his own yardstick and made this wrong move. King

Xiaocheng no longer has any hesitation about this man and will not hold back anymore.”

Xiang Shaolong frowned: “In this case, why didn’t King Xiaocheng seize Zhao Mu immediately?” Zhao Ya coldly snorted: “Did you know how Le Cheng died? Over two hundred of his best men killed or injured in the time needed to boil a cup of tea. Zhao Mu did not have such capabilities and must have received assistance from someone. Besides, we have no evidence and dare not act rashly. The king had wanted to recall Lian Po or Li Mu but we will fall into the mastermind’s trap. Ai! We are all in a dilemma.”

“Oh heavens,” Xiang Shaolong told himself. Even Tian Dan has been embroiled into this case. Maybe Li Yuan will be implicated sooner or later. Le Cheng’s death has brought about many effects.

Thinking ahead, Xiang Shaolong acted alarmed: “Guess I better head out to the farm tomorrow and leave this place of deceit. I will focus on horse-breeding and occasional pleasures of the flesh and happily live this life.”

Zhao Ya whined: “If you really leave, then what is to become of me?”

Xiang Shaolong declared: “You are you; I am I. What has Princess got to do with me? You promised to be frank and only shared little titbits of information with me like I am begging you for it. I seriously don’t give a hoot about your information. If not for your soothing touches, I would have thrown you out of the house and here you dare to ask me what is to become of you!”

Not only was Zhao Ya not offended, she was laughing till she nearly couldn't catch her breath. Holding her belly in pain, she asked: "Have you fulfilled your promise? You only know how to anger others. Ai! Times passes fast when I am with you. Too bad I still have to visit my brother in the palace. Shall I come by to accompany you later?" Xiang Shaolong moaned: "If you want my wounds to reopen and bleed, then come and find me! This is called sacrificing blood to accompany the jade beauty"

Zhao Ya cried: "You rejected me again; am I not attractive to you?" Xiang Shaolong started to undress and hissed: "If you don't believe, feel free to check out my body."

Zhao Ya laughingly helped him up and exclaimed: "I take my hat off you! Not an inch of shame and decency. I'll need to go off. Can you send me to the door?" Holding hands, Xiang Shaolong led her back to the east room, through the corridor and back to the courtyard.

Zhao Ya was in great spirits and began to hum a tune that Xiang Shaolong used to hear from her frequently.

Xiang Shaolong could not endure and asked: "Why is Princess exceedingly happy tonight?" Zhao Ya's complexion suddenly darkened and she lowered her head in silence. Until she reached the external ground and boarded her carriage did she held onto the window and waved to him softly saying: "After Xiang Shaolong's departure, I thought of suicide on many occasions but that will only benefit Zhao Mu. I had also hoped to be able to do something for Xiang Shaolong. Now that success is nearing, how can I not be delighted?" Xiang Shaolong could feel his hostility reducing and his mind is in turmoil.

Following her lead, he asked: "If Zhao Mu is dead, what are your plans?" Her face becoming burning red. Gazing at Xiang Shaolong with strong feelings, she said: "At first I did not know what to do. After your insolent attack yesterday, I know I have found someone to replace Xiang Shaolong. No one else will suffice. Does Master Dong understand my thinking?" The blind was lowered, blocking Xiang Shaolong's sight.

Even though the horse carriage has gone far, he is still stoned on the courtyard, tasting an indescribable sensation.

Shan Rou and Jing Jun were waiting in the hall. Shan Rou is enthusiastically poring over a map laid on the table while Jing Jun is yawning and couldn't wait to get away.

"Where are they?" Xiang Shaolong asked. Shan Rou impatiently answered: "Who knows if you are coming back? I have sent them to sleep first."

With a pained expression, Jing Jun pleaded: "I did not sleep the whole day like sister; why didn't you send me to sleep too?" Shan Rou rolled up the map and glared at him: "Are your legs grown on my body? You did not go to sleep on your own and now you are blaming others."

Jing Jun shot back: "Earlier, I said I wanted to sleep. Who is the one who dragged me out to check out the map?" Lacking a good reason, she gave him a strong shove and chimed: "Get lost! I have someone to accompany me now."

Jing Jun shook his head helplessly and gave Xiang Shaolong a look of

sympathy before disappearing like a burst of smoke.

Putting aside Zhao Ya's issue, Xiang Shaolong sat opposite Shan Rou and asked: "Let me see what ugly drawing you have done." Shan Rou was about to reopen the map but hid the map behind her upon hearing his words. Her almond eyes staring at him, she spit: "I dare you to repeat that!"

Giving in, Xiang Shaolong toned down: "My good sister. Will you please allow me to admire your masterpiece that was resulted of your dedicated sweat, blood and tears?" From annoyance to joyfulness, Shan Rou laid out the map and hummed: "Dedicated sweat, blood and tears? You are so good at exaggeration."

Focusing on the map, Xiang Shaolong was quickly absorbed.

It is a geographic map of both within Handan City and the outlying areas. The details are precise and stunning. Although it is not as good as satellite pictures of the 21st Century, it is still a rare piece of work. Xiang Shaolong did not expect Shan Rou to be so talented but on the other hand, this is a basic requisite of an outstanding assassin.

Shan Rou was pleased that Xiang Shaolong is giving the map plenty of attention. She began pointing out several key points and explaining them.

Xiang Shaolong could not stop nodding his head and committing the information to memory.

When Shan Rou finished, he heard the street watchman shouting the time. It

was the third watch.

Xiang Shaolong gave a big stretch and yawned: "Can you accompany me to sleep?" Shan Rou turned red-faced, shot him a glare and folded her map. Shaking her head, she rejected: "I am not sleepy at all. You go ahead on your own! Zhi Zhi is in my room. If you like it, you can carry your biggest fan to your room." Xiang Shaolong casually replied: "If you do not want to sleep, so be it!" and entered his own room.

Shan Rou jumped out with both hands on her waist interrupting: "Hey!"

Xiang Shaolong was amused. Halting but not turning around, he asked with his back facing her: "What advice does Miss Shan has for me?" Shan Rou demanded: "Are you willing to help us sisters against Tian Dan or not?" Turning his well-built frame around, he put one hand out and offered: "Come! Let's talk more in bed."

Both of Shan Rou's cheeks turned reddish, adding more charm to this graceful beauty. Staring harshly stared at him and stomped her feet saying: "Who is afraid of going! If you are lying to me, I will kill you with one stroke of my dagger."

Xiang Shaolong smilingly walked to her and pulled her soft and warm hand, leading her back to his room.

One step into the room, Shan Rou gave a violent struggle and pulled her hand back from his iron grip. She turned and tried to leave.

Xiang Shaolong moved quickly and blocked her way taunting: “I thought we have agreed?” Shan Rou’s face was burning like fire. She use her hand to press against his chest to avoid falling into his embrace. “No! No deal!” She shook her head strongly. She withdrew her hand, stood straight up but lowered her head to avoid his devilish gaze.

Xiang Shaolong was very aroused and laughed: “This is not the first time we shared a bed together, why is there no deal this time?” Shan Rou shook her head violently and blushed: “No! I know this time it will be different.”

Xiang Shaolong noticed that she still dare not look straight at him and commented: “So the fierce like a tiger sister Shan also had a frightened and shy side of her!”

Shan Rou forcefully raised her fully-red face. Catching his eyes, she was frightened into lowering her head again. Stamping her feet, she whined: “Are you giving way or not?” Xiang Shaolong started to unbutton her dress and plainly replied: “Feel free to use your dagger!”

Under his caress, Shan Rou could not even stand straight, not to mention using her dagger.

Trembling, she cried: “Ah! Please let me go?” Xiang Shaolong well-trained hands have already unbuttoned her outer garments, revealing her inner garments as well as the start of a deep cleavage.

Shan Rou was shaking non-stop. She closed both eyes and was breathing quickly, causing her chest to heave a lot.

Xiang Shaolong opened up her clothes beyond her shoulders and exposed her sword injury and her chest muscles. Pressing down her shoulders with his left hand, he pressed the sword scar with his right hand and asked: "Does it still hurt?" The trembling Shan Rou yelled: "Ah! Of course it hurts! You.... Ai! Xiang Shaolong! You big bully!"

Xiang Shaolong moved his hand up and held onto her other shoulder tightly. He bent his head and kissed on the sword scar.

How can Shan Rou endure this? She groaned in the most arousing manner.

Xiang Shaolong took off her lower garments and carried her at her waist towards his bed.

Shan Rou weakly held onto his neck and buried her head in his shoulder, panting heavily. When Xiang Shaolong climbed onto the bed, she regained her strength and slipped out from his grasp and hid in one corner of the bed with her back against the wall.

Xiang Shaolong was feeling very sensual and tore after her, removing other parts of her clothing. Reminded of their earlier tussle when he saw her beautiful legs while her skirt was raised, his heart was burning with wild passion.

After a brave yet hopeless defence by Shan Rou, this normally-stubborn beauty is left with a tight and thin white singlet and a pair of sweet-smelling shorts.

Shan Rou suddenly became clear-minded and held on to her clothes while

Xiang Shaolong's invading hands have grabbed her round and supple legs.

Shan Rou feebly looked at him and tremblingly pleaded: "Xiang Shaolong! We cannot do this! You haven't even closed the door!"

Xiang Shaolong was tooting with amusement. Releasing his hold on her white jade legs, he climbed down the bed and laughed: "I thought Sister you are a fearless woman. So you were actually afraid of an open door! I will do what you want!"

When he reached the bed again, Shan Rou was seated up and staring hard at him.

Xiang Shaolong was smiling from ear to ear sat in front of her with their legs touching. He leaned forward and asked: "Rou Rou, did you forget your dagger?" Shan Rou gave a snort and gave him a charming look before scolding: "So what if I am armed? What can a dagger do against a pervert like you?" Xiang Shaolong unscrupulously reached into her singlet and fondled her firm breasts. "You are not only a first class assassin; you are a natural stunner as well" he praised.

With her eyes full of passion, Shan Rou weakly pressed on his shoulders and whined: "Have you had enough?" Xiang Shaolong was high on adrenaline to conquer this difficult beauty and countered: "Has Sister Rou had enough?" Shan Rou can no longer keep her eyes open. Out of a sudden, she grabbed his evil hand through her shirt and panted: "Can you stop for a while?" This is the first time Xiang Shaolong ever hear her speak in such a pleading tone. Letting his right hand rest between her breasts, he stopped and smiled: "So

what now?" Shan Rou forcefully opened her eyes and protested; "I had said you were up to no good. See what you have caused!" Xiang Shaolong acted surprised: "What have I caused? I have caused you to be so mesmerizing and adorable!"

He started fondling again.

Shan Rou can no longer resist and trembled with his violations. She begged: "Can I say a few words?" Xiang Shaolong arrogantly halt his invasion and victoriously exclaimed: "What else is there to say? You should know what is about to happen!"

Shan Rou shying lowered her head and added: "I know so I am here to negotiate with you."

Xiang Shaolong roared: "In any battle, the loser will have to be kicked out of the city. What is there to negotiate?"

Shan Rou roared back: "Who has surrendered? You only won a small battle, I... ..." Xiang Shaolong is even more turned-on. He withdrew his right hand and smiled: "Ai! I almost forgot you still have some territory that I have not conquered. You still have your capital."

When his hands retreated, Shan Rou recovered quickly and somersaulted out of his devilish claws. She rolled till she reached the bedside and giggled: "Don't come over or I will get out of your room!"

Xiang Shaolong has no intention of pursuing. Adopting a waiting attitude, he shifted himself and leaned against the wall. Fully stretching his legs, he

pointed at her and commanded: “Wifey come here obediently.”

In a messy state of undress with her hair out of place, the sexy Shan Rou put her arms on her waist and snubbed: “No!”

Noticing the full-of-confidence Xiang Shaolong sitting there admiring her body, she softened and coldly offered: “Unless you promised not to molest me.”

Xiang Shaolong said in a huff: “Who will retreat having tasted some victory? Shan Rou, you are a mature woman and you should know there are some things tonight that you cannot avoid.”

Shan Rou gave him faint look and acceptingly moved to his side. Adopting the same posture and stretching her beautiful legs, she smoothly said: “You should know better. I know I was arrogant in masquerading as your wife but I am unwilling to subject myself like other females. Other girls are born to be slaves or concubines or courtesans but I will not accept such a fate. Ai! I do not know how to explain further.”

Xiang Shaolong was filled with guilt. Shan Rou possess different views about females compared to her peers. Putting his hand around her shoulder, he locked her fragrant lips in a deep kiss and both of them were lost in paradise.

Shan Rou responded with great sensations.

After a while, Xiang Shaolong held her face in front of his own. Peering into his crystal clear eyes, he vowed: “I will respect Rou Rou’s thinking. Tonight

shall end here. You can sleep in my bed while I find somewhere else to sleep.”

Shan Rou was lost and faintly asked: “Are you seeking Zhi Zhi or Tian sisters?” Xiang Shaolong replied: “I do not want to wake them. There is another spare room right? I will sleep there.”

Shan Rou was moved and said: “I have never seen someone like you who is always so considerate about other people. Fine. Let’s go there together.”

“Let’s go together,” was Xiang Shaolong’s stunned reply.

Shan Rou resumed her haughty composure and curled up her mouth announcing: “If you violate me again, I will personally throw you back here to sleep alone. You are to keep this between us. Do not expect me to be as obedient as Zhi Zhi. Unless I desire you myself, you are not to take any liberties with me.”

Xiang Shaolong remarked: “Aren’t you stealing the bell while covering your ears?” Shan Rou was curious: “What is stealing the bell while covering your ears?” Xiang Shaolong explained: “The thief covered his ears while stealing the bell. When he was running and the bell was ringing, he thought that if he cannot hear it, neither can others. Isn’t that what you are doing now?” Shan Rou bent over laughing and cried: “How is it the same? Nothing is ringing now!” Xiang Shaolong chuckled: “Has Miss Rou forgotten that she can moan?” Shan Rou was deeply embarrassed and forcefully pulled him down the bed hissing: “Come! It will be daybreak soon.”

Xiang Shaolong was doubled up in laughter: “Rou Rou, there is evidence of your bell theft on the floor and on the bed.”

In the comfortable night, two beating hearts were ringing. Both of them felt like they were having an exciting affair under the watch of the entire world.

## Chapter 06

### Each having their own motives

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Having tasted the forbidden fruit, Shan Rou was much more compliant and well behaved. Early in the morning, she pretended nothing has happened and brought Zhao Zhi to practise their swordsmanship on the garden. Jing Jun was pining for his pretty village girl and left for the farm at daybreak, leaving Tian Zhen and Tian Feng to breakfast with Xiang Shaolong.

Wu Guo came in and reported: “Marquis Pingshan has sent word to invite third master to his residence in the afternoon.”

Xiang Shaolong was alarmed. The person who wanted him to be the City Commander was Zhao Queen Empress Jing and not Han Chuang. Otherwise, it will not be easy for Han Chuang to fix an appointment with the First Lady of Zhao.

Thinking deeper, everything starts falling in place.

Handan City’s generals were all split into different factions. He is the only one who has yet to ally with any party. If he becomes the City Commander, he will naturally be the confidant of Empress Jing. After the demise of King Xiaocheng and the power transfer to Empress Jing, he will be her most powerful weapon.

But why did she choose him?

Wu Guo saw that Xiang Shaolong was deep in thought and dared not interrupt. When he was about to take his leave, Xiang Shaolong questioned: "How is the situation outside?" Wu Guo strictly reported: "It is more peaceful now but there are still Zhao soldiers doing checks at every main street. King Xiaocheng has sent out an official notice that no one is allowed to house any strangers and every inn is thoroughly searched."

Tian Zhen and Tian Feng like Wu Guo's character. Witnessing his strict reporting, they cannot help but laughed in secret. While Xiang Shaolong looked away, he winked at them, adding to their happiness.

Xiang Shaolong suddenly shouted: "Wu Guo!"

Wu Guo jumped up in fright and quickly acknowledged.

Xiang Shaolong instructed: "Send word to Talented Lady Ji that I will officially visit her in the evening and want to have dinner with her."

Wu Guo received his order and left.

Full of sweat, Zhao Zhi and Shan Rou came in and sat on his two sides. The Tian sisters hurriedly see to their needs.

Recalling Shan Rou's enticing figure and wild beauty, his heart sweetened and coaxed: "Aren't the both of you going for a shower first?" Shan Rou hesitated but Zhao Zhi joyfully complained: "But I am hungry!" As she ate, she continued: "Sister Rou's steps have slowed down and I am able to catch up."

Xiang Shaolong understood the reason for the slowing down and nearly spit his bun out.

Shan Rou's face reddened and she pinched Xiang Shaolong's thigh fiercely under the table.

Zhao Zhi was deep in thought before enlightenment shone on her face. Her face then turned red and lowered her head, eating in an awkward atmosphere. Xiang Shaolong was humoured. Feeling both girls under the table, he then stood up patting his stomach, mentioning: "I am going out for a walk and exercise my muscles."

Zhao Zhi yelped: "Wait for me! I nearly forgot Zhao Ba instructed me to bring you to the martial school."

Xiang Shaolong joked: "Is this considered an invitation?" Zhao Zhi's face was fiery red by now and she retorted: "Your legs are not grown on my body; Who cares where you are going." Smiling sweetly, she batted her eyelids and left.

Xiang Shaolong faced the Shan Rou who is still eating and added: "We'll wait for sister!"

Shan Rou gave a loud howl and kicked over with her leg.

Xiang Shaolong avoided and smiled: "My good Rou Rou. Do you still think your kicks are as formidable as last night, nearly taking my life?" Smoke coming out from her ears, Shan Rou picked up a bun and threw it at his face.

Xiang Shaolong caught the bun neatly and took a bite. “Sister Rou tastes better,” he said after a short moment of thinking.

As Shan Rou pounced up like a mad tiger, he has followed Zhao Zhi and slipped into the bath house.

He spent the entire morning at the martial school. When Zhao Ba brought up “Long Shan,” Xiang Shaolong gave the excuse that he was at the farm.

As Zhao Zhi was directing fifty female warriors in their practice routines, Zhao Ba pulled Xiang Shaolong aside and intimately said: “I was summoned to the palace last night by King Xiaocheng and your name came up.”

Stunned, Xiang Shaolong asked: “What?!” Zhao Ba continued in a low voice: “He wanted to hear about how you and Long Shan battled Li Yuan. Naturally, I was full of praise.”

Xiang Shaolong quickly gave his thanks but his heart was muttering in turmoil.

King Xiaocheng may not be so astute to discover any suspicious points about him but the crafty and intelligent Guo Kai may raise some suspicions about this horse-breeding army. Of course, King Xiaocheng may be just thinking of a suitable position for him and is seeking advice from Zhao’s chief Martial trainer.

From Zhao Ba’s words, there must be other stuff that King Xiaocheng had spoken about. He must ask Zhao Zhi later if she knows anything.

For everyone's safety, he has to win over Zhao Ya and use her to investigate Guo Kai's schemes. Anyway, Zhao Ya had deceived him before. When he deceived her in return, this wanton woman can only accept her fate.

After lunch, Xiang Shaolong left Zhao Zhi at the martial school and went to Han Chuang's residence alone.

Handan City is slowly regaining its former peace but the pedestrians are much lesser. He met some soldiers occasionally and everyone paid respects to him. He felt more prestigious than his former position of Zhao's Number One Warrior.

Han Chuang's residence is swarming with strict Zhao soldiers. Xiang Shaolong deduced that Empress Jing has arrived even before him.

Why is she so anxious about him? Maybe she has a motive and needs someone she can trust to become Handan City's City Commander and this newcomer is the best choice.

He remember that Empress Jing and Zhao Ya were not on good terms at Tian Dan's feast. If Empress Jing recommends other people for the post, Zhao Ya may object but if it was Dong Horse Fanatic, Zhao Ya may adopt a different attitude altogether.

After the servant's report, Han Chuang came to receive him in the main hall. He brought Xiang Shaolong to a side hall and suspiciously emphasize: "Be careful when you speak later. This sister Empress is very formidable. If you say anything wrong, your City Commander promotion will be gone."

Han Chuang continued: “On this trip to Handan City, I have another mission – which is to escort my State’s seventh Princess here to marry the Crown Prince. Empress Jing use her as an excuse to visit so there will be no loopholes.”

Xiang Shaolong was amazed. This political marriage must be put together by Empress Jing. Among the six states, Zhao and Han are on much better terms.

Taking this chance, Xiang Shaolong asked about the alliance treaty. Frustrated, Han Chuang cursed: “Using Yan as an excuse, Tian Dan and Li Yuan made a huge disruption to the negotiations. These two people in cahoots are more dangerous than Qin as far as we from the Three-States Ally are concerned. Guo Zhong and I heavily suspect them to mastermind the assassination on Lord Longyang and you. Not satisfied with only his death, they wanted to kill you as well.”

Xiang Shaolong was blown away. With Zhao Ya’s reminder, he wasn’t as sure about his initial suspicion that Prince Xinling is the assassin. Although Tian Dan wanted to recruit him, it is just another form of “killing” him. In times like these, talented people that you cannot recruit are better killed so as to deprive other people of utilising them.

An attendant came to report that Empress Jing is ready to meet him.

With Han Chuang at his side, Xiang Shaolong crossed two stairwells, a huge garden before meeting the First Lady of Zhao in the inner chamber.

After they paid their respects, Empress Jing winked at Han Chuang. He

retreated with all the attendants, leaving only the two of them seated and facing each other across a table.

Dressed in a luxurious outfit, the Zhao Queen looked even more elegant and attractive.

Compared to Lady Pingyuan, they have their own strengths and it is hard to distinguish who better.

Flashing her eyes and scrutinizing him, Empress Jing simply said: “Does Mister Dong know why I set up an appointment to see you?” From her tone, Xiang Shaolong could tell that it was herself and not Han Chuang who wanted him to be the City Commander. Han Chuang is just the messenger. He respectfully bowed: “Marquis has mentioned. I am grateful for your kindness and I will do my utmost best to repay your favour.”

Empress Jing seemed to be unmoved by his display of loyalty. She coldly asked: “There are two reasons I chose you. Does Mister wish to know?” Xiang Shaolong raised his head in surprise; could it be that she was attracted to his masculinity?

Her beautiful eyes looking deeply at him, she slowly said: “The first reason is that Tian Dan looks up to you, so you cannot be incapable.”

Xiang Shaolong was hit by realization. Curious, he asked: “Can I know what the other reason is?” Empress Jing gave a light sigh: “Because you reminded me of someone else. He is fearless like you. Too bad for the timing and he can never be of use to me.”

Xiang Shaolong was stricken. The person she mentioned is naturally himself.

Noticing his silence, she asked: "Doesn't Mister want to know who he is?" Nodding, Empress Jing is pleased with his thoughtfulness. Her voice switching, she coldly asked: "What is your relationship with Zhao Mu? Why did he try all means to divert his gift of the Tian sisters to you instead?" Xiang Shaolong knows that this is a crucial moment that he cannot afford to hesitate or give an answer similar to the one he gave to Zhao Ya. He shrugged his shoulders saying: "Since I entered Handan capital, the Marquis of Julu has been showering me with gifts. I do not have the slightest idea of why he is doing that."

Glaring at him briefly, she deeply proclaimed: "From today onwards, you can only be loyal to the King and me, the Queen. Any deviation will result in untold misfortunes; don't say I did not warn you. Based on Mister's intelligence, I need not say more and you should understand what is going on!" Xiang Shaolong had to admit that she is really clever. This female strategist put herself on the same level as King Xiaocheng. He cannot even tell if her words are real or false.

On one side, she is using Zhao Mu. At the same time, she is guarding against him.

Empress Jing added: "Did Marquis Julu tell you anything that is of special importance?" Thinking for a while, Xiang Shaolong disclosed: "Marquis Julu is not very fond of Li Yuan and often asked me for suggestions on how to fix him. There are no other special information."

Empress Jing was satisfied and nodded her head. Changing the topic, she asked: “Does Zhao Ya often come to harass you? She is ugly right? What are you always so aloof towards her?”

Xiang Shaolong knows that she is asking these personal issues to test his loyalty. He gave a bored sigh: “I do not like loose women.” Empress Jing laughed: “I love your direct character. But if you want to be the City Commander, you have to stay close to Zhao Ya. Let this be my first order for you.”

Xiang Shaolong acted like he was unwilling and apologised: “Please forgive me for being a rough boor but I cannot deliberately cheat on anyone. If Empress sent me out to the battlefield for a fight to my death, I will not have the slightest hesitation.”

This is called advancing by retreating. If he forgoes his usual style just for the sake of the City Commander position, it will only cause this poisonous and cold-blooded woman to despise him.

True enough, Empress Jing is not the least offended. She consoled: “I know Mister is not such a person. But a loose woman can tempt men easily. I am not asking you to deceive her. I just want you to showcase your manly character and treat her like a common courtesan.”

Xiang Shaolong was enjoying her charming attitude. His heart warmed up, he teased: “That is also possible, but knowing myself, all women who have done it with me are all reluctant to leave me.”

Empress Jing was staring hard at him but now she is laughing like a shivering squid. Looking at him meaningfully, she said: “Why do you guys all love to brag about your abilities with women? With all these exaggeration, how can we tell who has the real ability?” Xiang Shaolong was suspicious and had a dying question. He held his tongue and laughed along: “From your speech, I realised that other men are also exaggerating too.”

Empress Jing turned red-faced, knowing that she slipped. Isn’t this as good as telling others that she had tried many other men before?

Recollecting Cheng Dan who stole his credit, Xiang Shaolong deduced that this ingrate may have been assisted by Empress Jing to reach his current position. By why didn’t she continue to lift him up and serve as the City Commander but chose himself instead? He was enlightened that this ambitious woman must have planted people within and outside the Imperial Court and used them for political manipulation.

Both of them did not say anything for a while and the atmosphere was awkward.

Empress Jing stood up and recovered her impenetrable aura. She coldly concluded: “I’ll make a move first! If you tell anyone about this event, I will never let you off!”

Xiang Shaolong was cursing inside but he acted respectfully. He finally sighed with relief after sending her away.

As he was bidding farewell to Han Chuang, Han Chuang put on a big display

of friendship and insisted on bringing him to the official brothels one day before releasing him.

Xiang Shaolong was idle and went ahead to visit Ji Yanran. From afar, he witnessed Tian Dan's entourage entering the Liu Residence noisily. He was frightened and returned home first.

Shan Rou and the Tian sisters were absent. After asking, he found out that Shan Rou went out shopping and took both sisters with her. Wu Guo accompanied him to his bedroom and enquired in a low voice: "Le Cheng's head has been sent to the farm. First Master asked Third Master what to do with it."

Xiang Shaolong answered: "Let First Master decide. Wait for a few days until security is not as strict and send the traitor's head back to Xianyang Chancellor Lu. Let him hand it to Empress Ji. Inform them to keep it confidential. Otherwise, everyone will know we killed Le Cheng."

Wu Guo received his order and left.

Xiang Shaolong slept for four hours and rushed towards Liu Residence. Shan Rou and the Tian sisters have yet to return.

The sun is setting in the west and everyone stayed indoors, giving the city a lifeless look.

Xiang Shaolong was feeling emotional. In fact, everything was caused by King Xiaocheng.

But this could also be fate. Otherwise, Xiao Pan will never be the future Qin Shihuang.

Ai!

This could be the Fate that Zou Yan was always talking about.

Arriving at Liu Residence, Ji Yanran has been pining for him. The attendant sent him straight to her loft. Zou Yan was present as well. This meeting of three was a happy occasion.

Ji Yanran prepared a set of exquisite dishes. When the three of them sat down around the table, the beauty poured wine personally for both of them. After toasting each other, she complained: "I only receive your news today. Before, I was thinking of you tirelessly and had a few white hairs."

Zou Yan was humoured: "If your hair is rebelling, I will represent all men and punish you with a cup."

Both persons toasted and drank one cup of wine. After Xiang Shaolong apologised to Ji Yanran, he winked at her. She understood his meaning and discharged her two attendants.

Ji Yanran lowered her voice saying: "It is really done by you. Really great. Over two hundred people dead or injured in such a short span of time. Not only was the City in chaos, even Tian Dan and Li Yuan were taken aback, confused and suspicious."

Zou Yan frowned: “This incident also revealed your tracks. When Tian Dan visited Ji Yanran earlier and this issue was brought up, he did mention that Xiang Shaolong could be the real killer.”

Xiang Shaolong was slightly stunned. He knew that he can deceive King Xiaocheng and Zhao Mu but he cannot deceive a legendary hero. Fortunately, he still has Teng Yi the trump card that can add doubts to Tian Dan’s hypothesis. He nodded and asked: “What did he ask from you?” Concerned about his safety, Ji Yanran did not reply and asked in return: “What should we do? What if he really suspects it was Xiang Shaolong?” Xiang Shaolong laughed: “There is no need to worry. In Handan City, everyone is suspecting one another. King Xiaocheng and company suspects it was done by Tian Dan and Zhao Mu. Besides, I have traps that will make my enemies tired and confused with my grass army and trees soldiers.”

Zou Yan was tickled: “Grass army and trees soldiers? This description suits Handan City very well. Ji Yanran and I did analyze Le Cheng’s assassination and thought it cannot be you. First, you have too little men; Second, you will not put the city on alert with this move without capturing Zhao Mu beforehand.”

Filled with concern, Ji Yanran chided: “Shaolong, you are too reckless!”

Xiang Shaolong sighed: “I thought over this many times before acting. No one will suspect me because I am heavily injured.” He continued to explain why he must kill Le Cheng and the extra benefits.

Adding: “If anyone were to investigate, they will discover that I have only a

hundred odd men in my residence and my top expert Long Shan is outside the city. Who will believe I have the ability to do such a thing. The very next morning, this same batch of men left the city back to the farm in one piece. Who could have imagined that they were Le Cheng's assassins?"

Ji Yanran and Zou Yan stared at him with disbelief. It is a miracle to use a hundred to fight two hundred without a single casualty.

Because of this point, even the brilliant Tian Dan should not have suspected it was them.

Ji Yanran was relieved and poured more wine for him, protesting: "You are always performing deeds that no one dares to perform, making me anxious. Ai! The days seem unfulfilling without seeing you every day."

Xiang Shaolong apologised: "But my agenda today in finding you is to ask you to separate yourself from me for a while by leaving for Xianyang first."

Ji Yanran's delicate hand shook and wine splattered on the table. Her face changing colour, she exclaimed: "I reject your proposal. Unless we discuss this properly, I will not accept any reason."

Xiang Shaolong looked pleadingly at Zou Yan but this great philosopher can only give a helpless glance.

After Ji Yanran filled Zou Yan's cup, she sweetly smiled: "Even if you think I am unreasonable, it cannot be helped."

Zou Yan tried to help: “Why did Shaolong want us to head for Xianyang first?” Ji Yanran picked up a piece of vegetable and placed it in Zou Yan’s bowl, stated: “No one else is allowed to bring up this matter anymore.”

Xiang Shaolong surrendered: “Fine! Let us give up this idea! Is Talented Lady satisfied?” Looking at him with strong emotions, her eyes seemed to say “Satisfied!”

Xiang Shaolong and Zou Yan smiled at each other bitterly.

Zou Yan asked: “Handan City is not a good place to stay around for long. Do you have any new plans?” Xiang Shaolong replied: “If I can be promoted to be City Commander, a lot of problems can be solved. If not, we have to use a good scheme to get Zhao Mu to the farm and forcibly capture him back to Xianyang.”

Ji Yanran butt in: “Don’t even dream that he will have the guts to leave the city. Even if he did, he will be escorted by one or two thousand soldiers. Every step will be well-planned so this is the worst strategy.”

Xiang Shaolong icily said: “I am now racing against time. The question is that Zhao is awaiting the arrival of more of my men and livestock which does not exist. So I have to get Zhao Mu to rebel in the shortest time. Once he becomes isolated, he will be an easy prey for me. But the time is still the biggest challenge.”

Both persons were worried about him.

Xiang Shaolong remembered Tian Dan’s earlier visit and asked again: “What

is Tian Dan here for?" Ji Yanran blushed and replied: "What good can it be? He officially invited me to visit Qi as his guest."

Xiang Shaolong secretly admired Tian Dan's direct actions and asked: "How did Yanran answer him?" Ji Yanran said: "I told him I needed to consider for a few days as I want to ask your opinion first."

After a moment's thought, Xiang Shaolong surmised: "I guess Lord Longyang is the only person who guessed correctly about our relationship. This is favourable to us. Despite not knowing who his assassin is, we benefitted from this episode and dissolved the threat of his constant scrutiny."

Ji Yanran happily cried: "I don't care. I am going to your place tonight. I have many issues in my heart that I want to share with you!"

Xiang Shaolong was curious: "What issues? Can't you say it here?" Zou Yan was laughing and suggested: "Shall I absent myself?" Ji Yanran's face was burning red. She viciously kicked Xiang Shaolong under that table and shyly whined: "Mister Zou is also teasing me."

Xiang Shaolong suddenly realised that the "issues" are just something she said for Zou Yan's sake. The truth is she can no longer hold back her strong desires and wanted to make out with him.

Checking the time, Xiang Shaolong joked: "I will await Miss Ji's presence tonight. Oh! Do you have any idea when Le Cheng's funeral is?"

Both of them shook their head.

He consolidated his thoughts and asked about Li Yuan.

Ji Yanran informed: “He came to pester me every day. From his words, it seems like he is very close to Guo Zhong. I believe Guo Zhong will marry his daughter to him for sure.”

Thinking about Guo Xiu'er future, Xiang Shaolong gave a sigh and bid his farewell before leaving.

There are many things that cannot be rushed. He can only pray to become the City Commander.

## Chapter 7

### A Significant Difference

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Xiang Shaolong had just stepped into his residence with Wu Guo received him and reported: “Princess Ya is here. I invited her to the east room but she insisted on going into the inner hall. She has a dreadful look on her face!”

Earlier, he had seen Zhao Ya’s carriage and Zhao Da in the driveway. There is also a platoon of Zhao soldiers outside his door. Hearing about Zhao Ya’s dreadful look, he felt uncomfortable and inquired: “Where is Miss Shan and Miss Zhi?” Wu Guo answered: “They have gone back to visit Uncle Zheng and is not coming back tonight.”

Xiang Shaolong frowned: “Did they meet each other?” Wu Guo stated: “Miss Shan received her personally while Miss Zhi hid herself.”

Xiang Shaolong was relieved and strode right into the inner hall. Just as he stepped over the door ledge, Zhao Ya who was seated alone at the table lifted her pale face and looked at him.

Xiang Shaolong sat down beside her and asked carefully: “Why is your complexion so pale?” Zhao Ya icily demanded: “Dong Kuang! Did you really send your men to hold back Xiang Shaolong?” Xiang Shaolong had a big shock and put on an irritated look before replying: “Why did Princess make such a remark? Do I look like someone who breaks my promises?” Zhao Ya shot back: “In that case, why did I receive news that Xiang Shaolong was disguised

as a travelling merchant and appeared in a village thirty miles east of Handan City? He was even involved in a fight with the local guard.” Xiang Shaolong set his mind at rest. Teng Yi had finally acted. Concerned, he asked: “Did they capture Xiang Shaolong?” Zhao Ya shook her head: “In the wilderness, no one is his match!”

Xiang Shaolong curiously asked: “In this case, why is your face so deathly pale?” Zhao Ya was shaken and lowered her head, confessing: “I have no idea too. I think I am afraid that he knows that his tracks are exposed and he may not come to Handan anymore.”

Xiang Shaolong understood her dilemma. She wanted him to come but wanted him to stay away at the same time. He lied: “My men detained him last night and warned him in Princess’s name. At the end of the day, I still do not comprehend why he wanted to come so close to Handan City. I have just received this news and have yet to inform Princess.”

Zhao Ya looked at him suspiciously: “Are you lying to me?” Xiang Shaolong pretended to be infuriated and roared: “You just wait here, I will show you the evidence that I am not lying. Then I will chase you out of my residence and never want to set my eyes on you again!”

Before she can say another word, he slipped back to his bedroom and retrieved a flying needle. He fondled the Tian sisters for a moment before heading back to the inner hall and put the flying needle on the table in front of Zhao Ya.

The flying needle shone under the lamp.

Zhao Ya stretched out her finger and stroked the needle, hot tears pouring out from both eyes. She trembled: “Heavens! You really found him. What... What did he say?” Xiang Shaolong used his sleeve to wipe her tears and lied: “He did not say anything. When we asked him for proof, he picked out this needle from a belt that is filled with flying needles. With that he left us. I did not expect him to stick around; he is really courageous.”

Zhao Ya did not have any more doubts left. Gritting her teeth, she spoke softly after some time: “Dong Kuang, can you help Zhao Ya with another favour?”

Xiang Shaolong was piqued: “What favour do you want? Hey! I nearly forgot to chase you out and you still dare to ask for favour...” Zhao Ya did not even hear his words and begged in a soft voice: “Can you bring me and catch up to him?” Xiang Shaolong was aghast: “No way!”

In a daze, her body was shivering uncontrollably and she turned around and fell into his arms. With a loud “Hoo!” She began crying her heart out.

Filled with her sweet embrace, Xiang Shaolong was saddened as well and sighed that she should not have betrayed him knowing that this will be the end result.

After crying out all the pain and suffering in her heart, Zhao Ya recomposed herself. Still in his arms, she sobbed silently and the front of Xiang Shaolong’s shirt is all drenched. As he is wondering how to end this situation, she calmed down.

After she stopped crying, Zhao Ya sat still and lowered her head while Xiang Shaolong dried her tears.

Xiang Shaolong commented: "Princess must have owed Xiang Shaolong plenty of tears in her last life so she has to return so many tears today."

Zhao Ya forced a smile and shook her head in silence. Her complexion remains abnormal.

Xiang Shaolong noticed her eyes were swollen with all the crying and sighed: "No one else can replace Xiang Shaolong in your heart. Princess need not deceive myself and yourself."

Zhao Ya apologetically reached out and felt his wet shirt. Her pretty eyes flashing of desire, she bit her lips: "I want to try. Dong Kuang. I need a man now. Can you carry Zhao Ya into your bedroom?"

Xiang Shaolong was in a difficult position. If he rejects her again, it would put him as an unreasonable man. At the same time, he did not wish to hurt her fragile heart anymore.

For the sake of the City Commander promotion, he cannot offend her.

After he is done with Zhao Ya and Ji Yanran comes along later, will he still have the energy?

Zhao Ya's face is burning hot and she whined: "What are you hesitating about?" Xiang Shaolong sighed loudly and lifted her up but his mind is back in

the 21st century. Based on his memory, he is trying to recall the dirty films he has seen and wanted to try out something new and exciting. If he used his usual methods, he may not be able to deceive this experienced woman whom he done with on many occasions.

For an unknown reason, Zhao Ya was trembling with strong emotions. It could be that she is carried but an athletic and well-built man like Xiang Shaolong. Without any foreplay, she is already visibly excited and cannot hold back any longer.

Thinking that there is no way out for him, Xiang Shaolong stepped into his bedroom and placed her on his bed.

Gazing at him, Zhao Ya's face is red like fire and she was panting non-stop. Her unconventional look is the most enthralling.

Xiang Shaolong stood at the bedside and was feeling very inappropriate. In the moment, he cannot understand why as well.

Zhao Ya softly invited: "Why is Mister Dong not joining me" Xiang Shaolong is having cold feet and purposely brought up: "Did Li Yuan visit Princess recently?" Zhao Ya did not reply at once and looked at the empty bed space beside her. Upset, Xiang Shaolong forced: "Answer my question first."

Zhao Ya closed her beautiful eyes and whispered: "Nope. I am busy with palace duties and did not meet anyone. There are only two men on my mind. One of them is you, and the other one you know who he is."

Xiang Shaolong sat on the bedside and gritted his teeth, undressing her. He asked in a low voice: "Who is a better lover? Li Yuan or Xiang Shaolong?" Zhao Ya reopened her eyes and gave a trouble answer: "What a difficult question! Oh..." Xiang Shaolong had started to fondle her breasts tenderly and whispered: "I wish to know!"

Under his caresses, Zhao Ya was shaking uncontrollably. Fidgeting, she moaned: "No one is as good as Xiang Shaolong. He is the only man who knows how to appreciate women. Ah! Dong Kuang! Please continue your torture!" With Xiang Shaolong's movements, Zhao Ya is stark naked. She continued to pant and moan under his revenge-filled invasion.

After the heavy petting, he climbed onto her.

Zhao Ya's reactions were close to maniacal. After the session, both parties are dog-tired. Although he is pining for Ji Yanran, he lacked the energy to leave the room. Although this session is two hours long, it is still early and he hoped that she hasn't arrived yet.

Lying on the bed, Zhao Ya is truly a treasure without comparison. She knows how to please men very well. There are prettier girls than her but there are not many who are more wild and wanton than her.

Zhao Ya suddenly entangled herself around him. When Xiang Shaolong was panicking about a second round, the beauty whispered into his ear: "I am absolutely delighted. Even if I were to die now, I would have no regrets."

Xiang Shaolong had to ask: "Who is better? Xiang Shaolong or me?" After two

fragrant kisses on his face, Zhao Ya gazed deeply into his eyes and corrected: “Are you referring to the previous Xiang Shaolong?” Xiang Shaolong could feel his entire body turning into winter and every limb was numb. He put up a brave front and asked: “Why did Princess make such a comment?” Zhao Ya flipped over and pressed her body weight on him. After a few more hot kisses, her warm tears flowed like the fountain and she cried: “Shaolong need to hide from me anymore. You forgot to apply your fragrance and the herbal smell is gone. When I was leaning in your bosom earlier, I recognize you and therefore ask for your love session to confirm my guess. Ai! Shaolong! You may be the most capable man on earth but how can you hide from me when you are in bed? Heavens! Such a delicate mask that caused me so much agony.” She then tried to grab his mask.

Xiang Shaolong removed his mask before her grab and revealed his real looks. Zhao Ya’s pearl-like tears were dripping all over his face. Filled with agony and happiness, she sobbed.

Xiang Shaolong sighed to himself. He stroked her alluring back for a while and flipped over, pressing Zhao Ya below his own body. Staring deeply into her eyes, he gave a forced smile: “Tian Dan was right. My soft-heartedness is my biggest flaw. Witnessing how pitiful and desperate you are over me; I abandoned all our past hatred. Otherwise, how can you embrace me and find out who is behind the sunglasses?” Cursing at his stupidity for there are no such thing as sunglasses in this ancient times, he stuttered: “Anyway you found out my true identity.”

Under the present circumstances, Zhao Ya is not thinking deeply and delightfully chimed: “Heavens! You have forgiven Ya’er? Shaolong! Please

kiss me!”

Even if he did not want to please her, he did not have any other choice. He bent his head and covered her face with kisses.

Zhao Ya passionately reacted. With her adrenaline flowing, she was holding him so tightly that he almost couldn't breathe and they descended into madness.

After a long entanglement, Xiang Shaolong was finally able to rest his mouth.

Flustered and in ecstasy, Zhao Ya panted: “Shaolong! Can you call my name? Ever since Ya'er committed that big and stupid mistake, I have never enjoyed a moment of happiness and seriously depressed.”

Wasn't she happy with Qi Yu, Han Chuang and Li Yuan? Xiang Shaolong thought of but just couldn't bear to ask.

Reading his face, Zhao Ya understood what is on his mind and made a solemn vow: “Ya'er knows that she has erred. From tonight onwards, if Zhao Ya betrays Xiang Shaolong in any manner, let me be subjected to the worst forms of torture until my eventual death.”

Xiang Shaolong did not know what came over him. He reached to her ear and called: “Ya'er! Ya'er!”

These two words heralded a new storm. When the clouds have dispersed and the rain has stopped, Zhao Ya was lying next to Xiang Shaolong. Twisting her

body to face him, she praised: "You are really formidable. With a hundred men, you killed Le Cheng as swiftly as lightning and as quiet as a mute, causing plenty of suspicion."

Xiang Shaolong comfortably stretched his masculine and well defined body. His hand slapped her bum with a loud "Piak!" and started to caress it, asking: "Did you people suspect me?" Zhao Ya disclosed: "Of course we did! But your men left the city early next morning. All of them were fresh-looking and nobody was injured so that ended our investigations. Ai! Who can beat you?" She continued in a softly: "Can I beg you for a favour?" Xiang Shaolong was disturbed and hissed: "Are you trying to cut a deal with me?" Terrified, Zhao Ya clarified: "No! Ya'er dare not. I am begging you."

Xiang Shaolong coldly said: "Speak!"

Like a frightened bird, Zhao Ya snuggled closer and buried her face in his broad chest. She whined pitifully: "I beg that you do not use such tones with me. This will cause me to fear that you will abandon me again. When I agreed to help King Xiaocheng against you, I set the condition that you must never be harmed. Otherwise, I will never betray you."

Xiang Shaolong remained expressionless and state: "You have yet to tell me your favour."

Suppressing her fear, Zhao Ya gingerly divulged: "Lady Ni's death is caused by Zhao Mu. King Xiaocheng is guilt-ridden after the incident but there is no point crying over spilt milk. That is why he is now distancing himself from Zhao Mu. When the Wu Family and you left for Qin, he aged ten years in one

night. He is tormented with sickness and joint pains. Heaven is punishing him already.”

Xiang Shaolong protested: “He has seemed to forget about his own daughter.”

Zhao Ya was startled: “Can you let him off?” Xiang Shaolong regained his clear mind and intelligence. He did not want to force Zhao Ya to choose between King Xiaocheng and himself. He sighed: “Fine! Since you pleaded on his behalf. I will not hold anything against him.” After all, Qin Shihuang will be the one to take care of him.

Zhao Ya was elated: “Shaolong, you are the best! Come, tell me what assistance do you require and I will do my best to help you.”

Thinking to himself, Xiang Shaolong concluded that this is a blessing in disguise. With Zhao Ya on his side, anything can be achieved.

Zhao Ya dare not offend Xiang Shaolong agreed to all the missions he gave her.

Xiang Shaolong was pining for Ji Yanran and was about to leave when Zhao Ya happily promised: “Time is of the essence. I will see the King immediately. I will make sure you become the City Commander. The only objection will be from Guo Kai as he has someone else in mind.”

Witnessing her devotion, Xiang Shaolong was thrilled and helped her to dress up. After all the tussling did he finally send her out personally.

Watching her entourage leaving, he returned to his residence and Wu Guo welcomed him and announced: “Talented Lady Ji just arrived, Hey! Third Master is truly capable. I will not be able to take it if it was me.”

Xiang Shaolong groaned inwardly. How is he to account to Ji Yanran later?

When Xiang Shaolong woke up, it was late in the morning. Shan Rou was the one who woke him up. Totally lethargic, he is aware that if this continues, even an iron man will fall apart.

Full of disdain, Shan Rou pinched his nose scolding: “Look at your deplorable state. You obviously still lacked sleep. Seems like I cannot even leave you alone for one night.”

Xiang Shaolong sat up on the bed and hooked his arm around her flexible waist and joked: “If you were here last night, I don’t think I can even get up!”

Shan Rou slipped away and stomped her feet: “You did not keep your promise and fooled around with Zhao Ya. I hate you.”

Xiang Shaolong was stunned and asked: “Wu Guo told you?” Shan Rou made a face and challenged: “He dares to keep it from me? Zhao Ya came first followed by Ji Yanran. You cannot even take care of your own health.”

Xiang Shaolong stood up and began some warm up exercises. “Rou Rou, shall we practise our swords together?” he invited. Shan Rou has never seen the warm up exercises of the 21st century and was taken aback: “Where did you learn such techniques?” Xiang Shaolong laughingly pointed to his brain and

continued to ask: "Where is your sister?" Shan Rou replied: "She is back at the martial school. After all, she is one of the instructors."

The Tian sisters entered and chimed: "Master Dong is finally up."

Xiang Shaolong felt ashamed and began washing up. He dragged Shan Rou to the garden to be his practice partner.

"Pi! Pi! Pa! Pa!" they were duelling when Teng Yi's heroic laughter was heard at the side.

Xiang Shaolong was overwhelmed to see him. Getting Wu Guo to take his place against Shan Rou, he breakfasted with Teng Yi in the main hall and updated him on his recent activities.

When Teng Yi heard how Zhao Ya discovered his identity, he smiled: "I had anticipated such a day to come. Third Brother is soft-hearted and still has old ties to this wanton woman. But this matter only benefits us and gives her the chance to atone for her mistakes. You have better get Zhao Da to spy on her. In case of any deviation, we can still escape."

Xiang Shaolong was relieved that Teng Yi did not blame him. He suggested: "With Zhao Ya's assistance, we can do a big job here and disrupt the alliance treaty of the six states. We may even create more trouble for Tian Dan and Li Yuan."

Teng Yi was astonished: "I thought you looked up to Tian Dan?" Exposed and embarrassed, Xiang Shaolong planned: "I had suspected the assassin to be

Prince Xinling but it seems even more unlikely now. It could well be Tian Dan and Li Yuan's scheme to break up the Three-State alliance. I will visit Lord Longyang later and test his suspicions. Ai! I trust people too easily and can be confused by them."

Teng Yi agreed: "This is both your strength and your flaw."

Wu Guo came in to report that Zhao Ya is here.

Xiang Shaolong and Teng Yi caught each other's glance and guessed that she is bringing good news.

## **Chapter 8**

### **Ready to Kill**

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Shedding her depressed attitude, Zhao Ya looked like a brand new person. She had regained her grace, beauty and energy. She smiled like a blossoming flower and her eyes were shining and attractive. Xiang Shaolong and Teng Yi were fascinated and stared in disbelief.

Paying her respects from afar, she cooed: “Abundant health to Master Dong and Master Long. Zhao Ya sincerely pays her respects.”

Xiang Shaolong and Teng Yi were embarrassed by such a greeting. The beauty behaved like nothing has happened between Xiang Shaolong and herself. Charmingly, she sat beside the small table and presented sweetly: “As per Master Dong’s command, I am lucky to stay alive. Wonder if I can redeem my sins.”

“Please report your accomplishments first and we shall judge them.” Xiang Shaolong laughed.

Zhao Ya smiled coquettishly and looked at him enchantingly. She then proudly state: “There are two big accomplishments and two small accomplishments. Let Miss tell you one by one.”

Teng Yi was amused and served her tea, guessing: “The first accomplishment should be the creation of Dong City Commander, right? This accomplishment

alone is enough to redeem your mistakes.”

Zhao Ya batted her eye lashes and praised: “With Brother Long’s appreciation, Zhao Ya’s worries are gone with the wind!”

Xiang Shaolong is full of happiness. Forgiveness is better than hatred and it serves more meaning and joy to life. Comparing the new Zhao Ya to the old is like comparing heaven and hell. He chuckled: “Quickly report the rest of the accomplishments and see how much grace you deserve from me.”

Zhao Ya’s face is shining with delight and she gushed; “I have persuaded King Xiaocheng to recall Li Mu back to Handan City and combine forces against the traitor Zhao Mu. Does this count as a big accomplishment?” Teng Yi banged the table and lowered his voice: “In this case, everything is set. I will be surprised if Zhao Mu does not rebel at once.”

Xiang Shaolong reached out and grabbed his hand tightly.

When Zhao Ya added her hand to join the two united hands, Xiang Shaolong laughed: “Such an accomplishment is enough for me to have amnesia and forget about Ya’er’s previous affairs.”

“Ah!” Zhao Ya cried. Shy but happy, she shot him a look.

After the hands are withdrawn, Zhao Ya continued: “That woman (Empress Jing) really recommended Master Dong to King Xiaocheng. When the King came to ask my opinion, I kept praising your abilities and scored another goal.”

Teng Yi and Shaolong stared at her in astonishment.

Like a carefree bird, Zhao Ya proudly detailed: “I told the King – If the Dong Horse Fanatic is the City Commander, he is still considered neutral. Zhao Mu will surely tempt him to his side. That Dong Horse Fanatic can pretend to ally with him and be our spy in Zhao Mu’s camp. We can investigate Zhao Mu through him and may gather evidence of his rebellion. When Li Mu is back, we can get rid of the traitor once and for all.”

Both men were overjoyed and praised her to the skies.

This opportunity is unbelievable. With this, they can execute all their plans.

Zhao Ya seriously said: “Thanks for your praises, Master Xiang and Master Long.” Teng Yi interrupted: “Have you forgotten I am Teng Yi? You can call me Second Brother!”

Zhao Ya is at the peak of Mount Happiness and sweetly greeted Teng Yi: “Second Brother!”

Xiang Shaolong warned: “Ya’er, if you carry on with your mood, it is as good as writing on your face that Xiang Shaolong is back.”

Zhao Ya adorably glanced at him and reassured: “Master Dong need not worry. Princess knows what to do.”

Teng Yi abruptly howled: “Why didn’t sister come and join us?”

Xiang Shaolong knew that she is eavesdropping. Zhao Ya was startled and look towards the back corridor.

Shan Rou was dressed in a luxurious long dress and swayed out in the most gorgeous manner. Her petite face remains tense and does not seemed happy about Xiang Shaolong's renewed ties with Zhao Ya.

Zhao Ya became awkward.

Shan Rou was expressionless but she showed her authority by sitting right beside Xiang Shaolong.

Teng Yi quickly winked at Xiang Shaolong. Shaolong is well-prepared and smiled at Zhao Ya: "With Ya'er's great plan, if we do find evidence of Zhao Mu and Tian Dan's conspiracy, does Ya'er think King Xiaocheng would dare to go against Tian Dan?" Shan Rou let out a small cry and became more focused and looked at Zhao Ya.

Zhao Ya herself is considered quite a beauty as well. Except for her weak spot for Xiang Shaolong, she doesn't give a d@mn about anyone else, including Shan Rou. She purposely delayed: "We shall see what happens then. If the plot is successful, all the impossible might become possible."

Shan Rou is now on the losing end. She pinched vigorously Xiang Shaolong under the table and wanted him to intercede for her.

Teng Yi spoke up first: "Qi is stronger than Zhao. In addition, Tian Dan did not come alone on this trip. Over ten thousand elite Qi soldiers are camping

outside the City wall. I think King Xiaocheng can only swallow his pride.”

Zhao Ya explained: “Qi’s current success is brought about by Tian Dan. If this man is gone, Qi will no longer be a threat to us. However, the ten thousand soldiers led by the famous general Dan Chu will not be easy to handle. Tian Dan is also escorted by a troop of the finest soldiers. Even if you attack him personally, it will still be an uphill task.”

Shan Rou coldly snorted: “We can create a new strategy and force him back to Qi. When he retreats, we will have an opportunity.”

Xiang Shaolong prioritised: “This matter still requires some planning. First, we must gather evidence of Tian Dan’s and Zhao Mu’s conspiracy. The rest can wait.”

Shan Rou was ecstatic: “Make sure you keep your promise!”

Xiang Shaolong chided: “You better be more respectful of Princess Ya so that she will help you in return.”

Zhao Ya took the chance and said: “Master Dong is wrong. Madam Dong has been very respectful.”

Shan Rou was embarrassed and submissively agreed.

Xiang Shaolong was reminded of Le Cheng and asked about his funeral.

Teng Yi suddenly asked: “Is the Lu Gong secret manual in the hands of Guo

Zhong?”

Zhao Ya protested: “Of course not! The manual is in my palace residence. Xiao Zhao and the rest are working hard to duplicate a copy. Once done, they will give the copy to Guo Zhong. But it all depends. If Guo Zhong seeks to leave Zhao, not only will he not get the manual, he will also not have a burial place.”

Xiang Shaolong then realised why Xiao Zhao and her lovely friends are not around. He guessed that Li Yuan’s courtship of Zhao Ya is not to take revenge on him but for the manual. He blamed himself for not being sharp enough to notice this earlier. To Zhao Ya, he warned: “You must take more precautions. Tian Dan and Li Yuan would love to get their hands on the manual. Even Prince Xinling may have sent someone here to get the manual too. He hates you to the core. Oh! I better send some men to protect you.”

Shan Rou volunteered: “Let us sisters take up this job!”

Shaolong was annoyed: “You only want a chance to assassinate Tian Dan!”

Shan Rou angrily retorted: “Am I such a narrow-minded person? You ingrate!”

When all three of them looked at her with suspicion, she cutely shrugged her shoulders and surrendered: “It is fine if no one believes me.”

Xiang Shaolong stood up: “Before I become the City Commander, let me seek out Lord Longyang and see what he thinks. Ai! It will be unbecoming if I have

recovered but did not visited him.”

Shan Rou coldly laughed: “Do not let him bewitch you.”

Xiang Shaolong coughed and stared at her with irritation.

Shan Rou covered her mouth and laughed in secret while Zhao Ya stood up as well and invited: “Ya’er is leaving too. Let me give you a lift!”

Lord Longyang was seated at a corner of the living room. The seat is covered with thick fur and propped up with a soft pillow. An exquisite embroidered blanket covering both his legs, Lord Longyang’s pale complexion greeted Xiang Shaolong as he was led in by an attendant. He softly greeted: “Forgive Lord for not paying my respects. Brother Dong is most courteous to come and visit me. Please come and sit beside me.”

Xiang Shaolong looked at his four males attendants and was curious about their delicate bodies, clear complexions and a powdery smell.

Lord Longyang understood and apologised: “Brother Dong need not be puzzled. They are all great beauties dressed up as men!”

Xiang Shaolong was amazed. Does Lord Longyang like women too? This will be a thousand year old tabloid article.

After he was seated and had a drink of tea, the four cross dressers and ten over bodyguards left the room.

Lord Longyang looked deeply into Xiang Shaolong's eyes. His own eyes full of gratitude, he softly thanked: "Brother Dong saved my life. What can I do to repay you?" Xiang Shaolong wanted to say that the only way to thank me is not to get fresh with me anymore. Instead, he said: "I am only doing my best for a friend. It is nothing much. Is Lord getting better?" Cold rays flashed from the eyes of Lord Longyang as he hissed: "They will have to try harder to kill me."

Xiang Shaolong lowered his voice and directly asked: "Who could be the mastermind? A gentleman will revenge his sufferings. I will never let my enemies off."

Lord Longyang closed his eyes and kept quiet.

Xiang Shaolong was bothered: "Is Lord keeping a secret from me? Who is the person who waves us to enter the gorge?" Lord Longyang opened his eyes and plainly said: "He is named Xia Yue. He has been located by Zhao soldiers. Too bad his throat has been slit and he cannot say anything anymore."

Xiang Shaolong was shaken: "Devious indeed. Killing the witness and eliminating the evidence."

Lord Longyang smiled coldly: "Killing him brings no benefit. He was originally from Qi and has been with me for only two years. I appreciate his swordsmanship and thought he was honest and reliable. To think that he turned out to be Tian Dan's spy."

Xiang Shaolong was stricken: "Tian Dan is really the mastermind."

Lord Longyang confessed: "I have long been puzzled at Tian Dan's coming to Handan. Now I finally know. He has no intention in the alliance at all. Now that Qin is having an internal strife, he wants to destroy our Three State Alliance. He harbours ill intentions against Zhao. With Li Mu at the border and Lian Po battling Yan, he took this chance to plot against Zhao. His huge army may have secretly entered Zhao and assumed different identities and are in hiding. Once activated, they will assist in conquering Zhao from within."

Xiang Shaolong has never regarded Tian Dan's problem to be so serious. He had a rude shock and cried: "Has Lord informed Zhao King of this theory?" Lord Longyang shook his head: "This is such a big issue and I do not have any evidence; how can I say it out? After I recover, I am returning straight to Daliang and escape all the adversities. If Brother Dong wants to leave with me, I will see to it."

Xiang Shaolong was curious: "Lord intends to watch Zhao swallowed up by Tian Dan?" A cold smile appearing on his face, Lord Longyang calmly replied: "It won't be so easy. Brother Dong has yet to reply me." Xiang Shaolong shook his head: "I appreciate Lord's kindness but my men and livestock are on the way here. How can I leave like that? After all, I am of Zhao origin and will fight Tian Dan if needed. I must avenge my injuries."

Lord Longyang sighed and slowly explained: "Tian Dan is the most powerful person now and your King cannot do anything to him. After Xiang Shaolong left, there are only thirty thousand soldiers left in Handan City. Most of them are old or weak. Li Mu and Lian Po are too far away to lend any assistance. If Brother Dong wishes to escape this calamity, the only way is to leave for

Daliang. Unless you surrender to Tian Dan immediately, he will never let you off. This man is more vicious than anyone I have seen.”

Xiang Shaolong is frightened by his words, knowing that he had underestimated Tian Dan. Luckily, he still has Zhao Mu’s support or he will die without knowing why. He stood up and wished: “Lord, please have a good rest!”

Lord Longyang knew he remained unconvinced. He sighed and closed his eyes in silence.

Standing quietly for a few seconds, Xiang Shaolong bid farewell and left.

Sunlight was everywhere but Xiang Shaolong felt like he is soaking in ice water.

The streets were as quiet as a graveyard but he could sense danger everywhere and feared an ambush.

After talking to Lord Longyang, his narrow view widened a lot and he starts to think about many things that he has never thought of before. Covering all the possibilities, he managed to paint a complete picture.

Tian Dan is filled with wild ambition and has an accurate picture of the warring landscape. While it is possible, he plans to swallow Zhao first.

After the collapse of the Wu fortress, the Handan army suffered deaths and heavy injuries. There are no strong men to fill up the deficiencies and can

only depend on weak and old women.

The Zhao army has two big pillars. However, Lian Po is battling Yan while Li Mu is fighting the Xiong Nu at the border. Both are unable to extricate themselves from the battlefield. The capital is leaderless. Using the excuse to discuss the alliance, Tian Dan brought over ten thousand soldiers as an escort but they can threaten the survival of Zhao anytime.

Of course! This army of ten thousand may not be enough to conquer Zhao. Lord Longyang's speculation of a huge army ambushed with Handan City is unbelievable as it will arouse suspicion. Lord Longyang has this theory because he does not know the relationship between Tian Dan and Zhao Mu.

Through Zhao Mu, he can manipulate the Zhao politics.

Once King Xiaocheng is dead, Empress Jing will be named as the culprit. Using devious methods, Lian Po and Li Mu can be dealt with.

With the two generals gone, Zhao will belong to Tian Dan.

The assassination of Lord Longyang is due to foreign relations.

The other five states will not sit by and watch Qi expand its territory and conquer Zhao. So Tian Dan needs their support.

Yan and Han can be ignored. Yan is busy fighting Zhao and Han is too weak to fight. In fact, Han has lost every battle it fought.

Only the remaining Wei and Chu are still a force to reckon with.

Wei and Zhao are heavily interdependent and Wei will not allow Qi to overrun Zhao land.

Chu is a different matter. Wei remains a great obstacle north of Chu. Without taking down Wei, the army of Chu will find it challenging to conquer China. Tian Dan must have enticed Li Yuan to attack Wei together and split the state between both Qi and Chu.

That is the reason why Lord Longyang is assassinated. It will be Li Yuan's idea to push the blame to Xiang Shaolong.

Due to a stroke of good luck, he disrupted their plans and spoiled their calculations.

Le Cheng's killing has worsened the situation for Tian Dan. A fool proof plan was given the death sentence. Ultimately, Tian Dan do has reservations about attacking Zhao openly. Wei and Han, the other two states of the Three State Alliance will definitely step in.

Now, he can only control Zhao via Zhao Mu and get rid of the two legendary generals. There are no other viable plans.

In such times, if Xiang Shaolong can ascend to become the City Commander, he will be in the centre of all the conflicts and influences.

After hearing his analysis, Teng Yi shook his head and sighed: "This kind of

false alliance only serves to cause one's depression."

Xiang Shaolong commented: "We are here in Handan for revenge only. But if this carries on, whether for ourselves or for work, we must try to destroy Tian Dan's and Li Yuan's conspiracy. No wonder Zhao Mu is confident of controlling Empress Jing. He has the solid backing of Tian Dan."

After further discussions, Xiang Shaolong head back to his room for a nap. At evening time, Zhao King sent someone to invite him into the palace. Xiang Shaolong was thrilled and set off at once.

This round, Zhao King received him in the inner hall. Empress Jing, Zhao Ya, Guo Kai and Cheng Dan were all present. After paying his respects, King Xiaocheng got him to sit at the best seat, followed by Guo Kai and Cheng Dan.

Empress Jing and Zhao Ya sat beyond the tables. Both women have a look of disillusion. It appears that he will not be promoted as the City Commander.

Xiang Shaolong was feeling nervous. King Xiaocheng asked about his injuries as an ice-breaker and he answered duly. Of course, he replied that he has fully recovered.

King Xiaocheng look slightly suspicious asked in a deep voice: "Your swordsmanship is incredible and you are good at deploying soldiers. Looking at your troops, we see evidence of your prowess. Have you thought of serving the military? If you accumulate military contributions, you can be promoted to be a Marquis in the near future, Regarding the farm, you can

delegate it to your men. Subject Dong only needs to focus on the big picture and not fret about the other small issues.”

Through the corner of his eye, he could see that Guo Kai and Cheng Dan have a jubilant look on their face. He knows that he has lost the promotion.

But why then did King Xiaocheng hint at another important post for him? His mind turned very fast and he thought of the problem and also knew why the two ladies are frowning.

Cheng Dan is the problem.

Both are important military positions but to Xiang Shaolong, they are as different as black and white.

Xiang Shaolong was alarmed. If King Xiaocheng announced his decision, the matter will be fixed and no one can change the decision in a short while.

Although Cheng Dan was promoted due to Empress Jing’s backing, he seemed to be allying himself with Guo Kai now and broke free of Empress Jing’s control. No wonder Empress Jing changed her stand to support him now.

Before anyone could react, Xiang Shaolong thankfully said: “Many thanks for the King’s generosity and opportunities. Even if I have to work myself to death, I must do my best to repay Your Majesty. I have some words that I am normally afraid to say but I will report them to Your Majesty now.”

From his surprising confession, even Empress Jing and Zhao Ya were taken aback. They wonder what he has to say at the risk of his life.

King Xiaocheng was moved: "Subject Dong, feel free to say whatever you want. I will not blame you."

Xiang Shaolong seriously said: "I have abandoned everything I have to return to my home state to build a farm. I did this because I am a descendant of Zhao and to also fulfil my father's dying wish to return to my roots. As long as Your Majesty has an order, I will execute it without hesitation and without complain."

King Xiaocheng kept nodding his head in appreciation.

Xiang Shaolong vehemently revealed: "But after my observation of the recent developments in Zhao, I feel that we are in mortal danger and can face annihilation anytime."

The colour changed in everyone's face. Guo Kai frowned: "Is Mister Dong exaggerating?" As King Xiaocheng's top advisor, if he failed to detect what Xiang Shaolong has seen, he would have failed in his job and is obviously upset.

King Xiaocheng encouraged: "Subject Dong, say what you want bravely and do not have any reservations."

Xiang Shaolong simply requested: "Can Your Majesty request the attendants to take their leave?" King Xiaocheng gave an order and everyone left,

including the guards. The hall is only left with the six of them.

Zhao Ya was totally intoxicated. She simply adores this heroic air of Xiang Shaolong.

Empress Jing's eyes are flashing with excitement, improving her opinion of him. She silently praised herself for choosing the right man.

Guo Kai's and Cheng Dan's face turned unnatural, disbelieving the possibility of any earth-shattering news.

Xiang Shaolong continued in a deep voice: "The distribution of power is for all to see. Qin is having an internal strife and every state can finally take a break and focus their energy in expanding their territory in order to unite the world. Today, the power-holders of all states are gathered in Zhao. On the surface, they are here to work together but on the contrary, they are scheming against one another. This kind of plotting is a hundred times more vicious than fighting on the battlefield."

Cheng Dan laughed coldly: "Aren't you being too negative?" King Xiaocheng furrowed his brows and added: "The alliance discussion is not proceeding smoothly but it doesn't seem as bad as it sounds."

Empress Jing and Zhao Ya did not know what to add so they maintained their silence.

Xiang Shaolong burst out laughing and explained: "Only Zhao, Han and Wei are sincerely working to an alliance. Qi and Chu are not sharing borders with

Qin and are not worried.”

Guo Kai insisted: “Even if Qi and Chu bore evil motives, Zhao has just beaten Yan and our prestige is sky high. Wei and Han will not sit by and watch Qi and Chu attack us. Moreover, Qi and Chu are ultimately concerned about Qin and what can they use to conquer us?” Xiang Shaolong smiled: “Of course they will use schemes to conquer us. The first example will be Lord Longyang. If he had not survived the assassination, the key suspect will be Prince Xinling. Even if Anli (Wei King) does not blame him, the imbalance of power will cause infighting in Wei. Then, Wei will not have the resources to deal with other states. Qi and Chu will benefit the most as the Three State Alliance will be destroyed.”

King Xiaocheng was agitated. He had suspected the assassins to be Tian Dan or Li Yuan but had stopped his speculation. He did not articulate the matter as clearly as or was as confident as Xiang Shaolong.

Cheng Dan interrupted: “Mister Dong had better watch his words. If this was leaked out, it will cause uproar.”

Zhao Ya coldly shot: “Who will leak this out?” Cheng Dan shut up.

King Xiaocheng stared at Cheng Dan discontentedly. He asked with suspicion: “Does Subject Dong have any evidence?” Xiang Shaolong replied: “Earlier, I was right beside Lord Longyang and understood the whole circumstances from him. Lord Longyang has a personal escort named Xia Yue. Lord Longyang told me that Xia Yue is from Qi and has been serving him for less than two years. After the attack, he was found with his throat slit. Why did

the mastermind want him dead? It is to prevent him from exposing the mastermind. If he is Prince Xinling's men, he can easily escape back to Wei. The mastermind can also kill him in Wei. Killing him at all costs can only tell us that the mastermind is still in our State of Zhao."

Guo Kai and Cheng Dan do not know how to rebut him. After the attack, the assassins have carted away all their injured men, leaving all the Wei corpses. Lord Longyang had not told them about Xia Yue so they did not know one of the corpse belonged to the traitor.

After some time, Guo Kai asked: "Why did Lord Longyang share this secret only with Mister Dong?" Xiang Shaolong simply said: "I had saved his life and he had wanted me to join him in Wei so he was the most honest with me."

King Xiaocheng's complexion is as dreadful as can be. He cursed fiercely: "Well done, Tian Dan and Li Yuan!" and he coldly added: "Subject Dong must never forget that the people of Chu can never be trusted."

Xiang Shaolong continued: "The second case is about general Le Cheng's assassination. General Le is the centre of influence of Handan's army. With his death, if there wasn't a promising replacement, the army will begin to destabilise. All Tian Dan or Li Yuan has to do is to collaborate with a few ambitious generals and they can manipulate our military. Our two famed generals Li Mu and Lian Po are situated far from Handan. By the time they are back, they will be too weak to put up a good defence. That is all I have to say."

Everyone is thinking about Tian Dan's ten thousand strong army camped

outside the city. If there is any internal chaos in Handan, this Qi army is sufficient to influence the any developments.

If he did not conspire with Zhao Mu, the Qi soldiers are not to be feared but the situation is different now.

Guo Kai and Cheng Dan remained dumbfounded. Like Xiang Shaolong before, they can see the danger but did not foresee the potential annihilation of Zhao.

Paled with fear, King Xiaocheng asked: "Does Subject Dong have any plan to reverse this dangerous scenario?" Using his advancing but retreating strategy, he answered: "I am only a martial arts practitioner and do not have any brilliant strategy. This kind of big issues had better be handled by Chief Advisor Guo and General Cheng."

Guo Kai and Cheng Dan were very awkward. In such a short time, what can they offer to resolve this complex and intertwined circumstances?

King Xiaocheng was disgruntled: "Can't someone give me a good idea?" Guo Kai helplessly coughed: "The best way is to end this quickly. We will secretly capture and kill all the suspicious traitors and remove the thorn in the flesh. Even if Tian Dan and Li Yuan have a scheme, they cannot do anything... .." Empress Jing interrupted: "Wouldn't that cause an immediate rebellion? After the Wu Family incident, we cannot afford any more upheavals."

Cheng Dan volunteered: "Leave this matter to me. I guarantee that I will destroy all the traitors as fast as lightning and as quiet as a dumbbell."

Unconvinced, King Xiaocheng asked: “Does Subject Cheng know who the traitors are? While you are still planning, the traitors may have rebelled already.”

Zhao Ya smiled: “Brother! Now you know that my words make sense! Only if Mister Dong becomes the City Commander, we can execute the ‘scheme within a scheme’ and capture all the rebels in one swoop.”

King Xiaocheng decided: “Subject Dong, receive your order. From this moment, you are Handan’s City Commander. During the morning court tomorrow, I will officially issue you the military seal. Do not disappoint me.”

Xiang Shaolong acted surprised before bowing with thanks.

Empress Jing and Zhao Ya were over the moon. Guo Kai and Cheng Dan exchanged looks of viciousness, seeming to have a plot to get rid of him.

All these cannot escape the sharp eyes of Xiang Shaolong. He laughed to himself. No matter how crafty they are, they will never guess that he and Zhao Mu share a special relationship.

Ha!

Now, he can openly conspire with Zhao Mu.

This is truly a miracle.

Xiang Shaolong requested King Xiaocheng that Teng Yi be made an assistant general before he left the palace.

## Chapter 9

### Lucky Encounters

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After hearing the entire story from Xiang Shaolong, Zhao Mu stood up happily and faced the sky laughing: "Heaven is really on my side. If I ever be the King of Zhao, you will be my Supreme Commander."

Xiang Shaolong was amused: "Time is of the essence. Let us plan against King Xiaocheng immediately. If Li Mu were to really return, the tide will turn against us."

After a moment's reflection, Zhao Mu asked: "Zhao Ya has succumbed to you but why if Empress Jing helping you as well. She is in cahoots with Cheng Dan and there is no reason she will help an outsider like you."

Xiang Shaolong then mentioned the part about Han Chuang and was bowled with laughter. With all his worries gone, he sat down again and said: "I must disclose our relationship to Tian Dan and regain his confidence."

Xiang Shaolong's face changed colour: "You must never do that. Unless you reveal your own true identity, he will not believe you with his intelligence. Why don't I pretend to defect and he may even withdraw his soldiers? It is better to reveal our intentions later and take some precautions against him"

Zhao Mu nodded in agreement: "You have thought through every detail. Li Mu will not be able to return so quickly. We still have some time."

Xiang Shaolong added: “Marquis had better gave me some names so that I can answer to the muddle-headed king and gain more of his trust.”

Zhao Mu smiled: “So what if he knows all my spies? But let me consider this first. Once we have our strategies in place, we can then push forward. We can fake King Xiaocheng assassination by Xiang Shaolong. Once I control the military, Empress Jing will have to cooperate with me. Li Mu and Lian Po will also see the end of their career. Hai! It is better that Le Cheng is dead for I have some suspicions of his loyalty.”

Xiang Shaolong took the opportunity and asked: “What is the relationship between Tian Dan and Li Yuan?” Zhao Mu brushed: “I see that they are just using each other!”

Xiang Shaolong can tell that Tian Dan is hiding some information from Zhao Mu regarding this issue and did not press further. He proposed: “Before I am officially promoted, I must try to meet up with Tian Dan and gain his trust. Does Marquis have any pointers?” Zhao Mu was pleased and clapped: “I am fully confident in your abilities. Do as you wish. Let me plan a few scenarios and I will discuss the grand plan with you.”

He added: “Tian Dan will be attending Guo Zhong’s banquet this evening. See if you can catch him on the road.”

Xiang Shaolong thought of a preposterous idea and departed with glee.

Xiang Shaolong is in his best mood. He slipped to Ji Yanran’s loft and shared all the news with her. After a quick session, he intercepted Tian Dan’s

entourage and entered his carriage.

Tian Dan is indeed a cautious person. The Liu Zhong Xia and Liu Zhong Shi brothers are still protecting him in his carriage.

Xiang Shaolong went straight to the point: "I have thought over carefully and decided to serve Chancellor with all my heart."

Tian Dan is overjoyed and asked: "I thought Brother Dong needs a few days to consider? Why have you made such a quick decision?" Xiang Shaolong seriously said: "I have just met King Xiaocheng and he wishes to make me the new City Commander despite all odds. This has forced my hand. I will slip away tonight and send someone to divert my incoming family and livestock to Qi to show my loyalty to Chancellor."

Even the brilliant Tian Dan was stunned for a while before he recomposed himself and cried: "Is Handan so lacking in talent that King Xiaocheng has to choose such an unqualified person as you? I do not believe that King Xiaocheng has such an open mind and foresight."

Xiang Shaolong explained: "It is due to my good relationship with Princess Ya. She knows that I am still dissatisfied with King Xiaocheng and used this promotion to make me stay and accompany her." While he spoke, he scrutinised Tian Dan's expression closely. When Tian Dan heard about his proximity to Zhao Ya, his eyes lit up. Xiang Shaolong deduced that Tian Dan might use his connection to Zhao Ya to steal the secret manual.

Tian Dan stretched out his strong hand and held Xiang Shaolong's shoulder.

In a serious manner, he dissuade: “Brother Dong, you must never leave like that. If you stay behind as the City Commander, you will lend me an even bigger helping hand, do you understand?” Xiang Shaolong pretending to protest: “But...” Tian Dan heavily emphasized: “From today onwards, Dong Kuang is Tian Dan’s good brother and we will share wealth and woe. Do not worry and become the City Commander. I will come and discuss matters with you after two days.”

Xiang Shaolong gave up. In these times, everyone he spoke to are blatantly lying with their eyes with open. On one hand, Tian Dan tried to take his life. With his value going up, he addresses him as Brother. If not for his special identity, he will die without knowing why.

The entourage is nearing the hilly roads besides Guo residence. Xiang Shaolong bid farewell and headed back to his residence.

Before daybreak, Xiang Shaolong and Teng Yi were in the palace attending morning court.

In front of all the officials, King Xiaocheng officially appointed Xiang Shaolong as the City Commander and Teng Yi as his Assistant General. He was given the official seal, official sword, and letter of appointment as well as other stuff.

Guo Kai knew that the decision is final and dare not say anything in retaliation. Zhao Mu’s lackeys, Empress Jing and Zhao Ya cheered with delight. An impossible appointment has now become reality.

After the court session, everyone came up to congratulate them and pave way for future collaborations, making both of them sigh with negativity.

King Xiaocheng personally accompanied Xiang Shaolong and Teng Yi to inspect the City Army, letting the soldiers know who their new Commander is and gaining their obedience.

King Xiaocheng proceeded to discuss with both of them the art of defending the city, Teng Yi took the chance to display his talent while Xiang Shaolong depended on his 21st century experience coupled with Mohist Founder Mo Yi's art of war. King Xiaocheng could finally rest on his laurels and celebrate his excellent choice of men.

The accompanying military leaders were all stunned into silence. From what the two men casually said, most of the strategies are something that they have never heard of. Initially unconvinced, they were finally won over by Xiang Shaolong and Teng Yi.

After the discussion, King Xiaocheng returned to the palace while another Assistant General Zhao Ming Xiong escorted both of them back to the East Gate Army Command Centre. North of the Command Centre's Great Hall, there is a raised armchair that is meant for the City Commander. When Xiang Shaolong took his seat there, over a hundred colonels, majors, captains and lieutenants lined up neatly on two sides and kneeled in respect. Xiang Shaolong felt like he was dreaming and cannot believe what is happening before his eyes.

In the following days, both men are busy deploying the soldiers, improving

their weapons and training new recruits. The elite soldiers are inserted into the City army and served as their personal escorts. At the same time, he located Pu Bu and four of his buddies within the City guards and promote them with some other soldiers to the rank of major so as to make it easier to deploy his troops in the future.

When all is done, Xiang Shaolong was relieved and went to visit Zhao Mu.

The traitor met him in the secret room. Zhao Mu sat down and laughed: “General Dong, can you guess what Guo Kai did to topple you? That ungrateful bastard sent me a secret note that you are a pawn of King Xiaocheng who is out to catch traitors like me. He asks me to guard against you and I nearly died laughing.”

Xiang Shaolong was infuriated. Guo Kai this lowly scum is willing to forgo the big picture and harm him for his personal gain. Such a cunning man! Xiang Shaolong coldly asked: “Can we do anything to bring him down?” Zhao Mu advised: “We must tolerate little nonsense like this and focus on the grand scheme. When Zhao is ours, I will destroy his family and subject him to all forms of torture. Let him enjoy his temporary freedom.”

Xiang Shaolong reported what had been discussed between Tian Dan and himself.

Zhao Mu praised: “You are a genius. No wonder Tian Dan is so enthusiastic lately. He kept visiting me to discuss plans to control the Zhao politics. Everything is ready but we still lack the chance to assassinate King Xiaocheng. Ai! I am getting impatient.”

Xiang Shaolong reasoned: “This matter cannot be rushed. I am still fresh in my appointment and have yet to fully control the army. Every day, my influence grows. The most crucial issue now is to gain King Xiaocheng’s trust by producing some results.”

Zhao Mu waved: “That is easy. We just leak some of our plans to King Xiaocheng and he will treat you like his most treasured object.” After further talks, Zhao Mu came up with a bunch of names. Most of them are situated outside the City of Handan.

Xiang Shaolong could tell from Zhao Mu’s flickering eyes that these men are innocent. Zhao Mu is using his hand to harm them. Cursing, he frowned: “How come there is no one within the City?” Zhao Mu hesitated before he added the names of two petty officials any another four military leaders. The four military leaders are guarding the Great Wall outside Handan. Wang Che of Ci District, (unabridged thread, post 25), whom Xiang Shaolong had met on his trip to Daliang, is also on the list.

Xiang Shaolong is even more certain that this traitor is using this excuse to get rid of his enemies. Withholding this discovery, he nodded: “Marquis must have some spies in the palace. It is better to divulge a few and gain the trust of King Xiaocheng.”

Zhao Mu happily added another two names; one of them is Zha Yuanyu (Post 26) who is Xiang Shaolong’s camp officer on his Daliang trip. Xiang Shaolong was amused that Zhao Mu was taking advantage of his ignorance about Handan. In fact, he is more familiar with Zha Yuanyu than Zhao Mu ever will be. He teased Zhao Mu: “Oh! Betraying our own people might not be

appropriate. Why don't we skip this list and find some other innocent people as scapegoats and affect our enemies' morale."

Zhao Mu's face changed colour. He can only keep his deceit to himself. If he did not change his list, then he will be openly lying to his 'confidante.' He frantically argued: "Let's see what happens in the next few days! If you have so much intelligence in such a short time, it will seem suspicious."

Xiang Shaolong laughed secretly and agreed: "I will obey all Marquis's instructions. When Marquis feels that the time is right, just send me the list!"

Zhao Mu sighed with relief. He appreciated that Xiang Shaolong is still as obedient despite his promotion and suggested: "I heard that you have promoted some men. I have a few men too that you can promote as well so that they can help you control the security."

Xiang Shaolong could tell that Zhao Mu is increasing his trust for him that he shared his spies' details with him. He patted his own chest and swore: "You can count on me. I will insert these people into important positions tomorrow."

Zhao Mu is glad and revealed the names of four colonels.

In the chain of command, the highest post is naturally the City Commander General. Under him will be two Assistant Generals, eight Colonels and twenty Majors. All of them have the authority to lead the soldiers.

The City Army is divided into ten battalions. Each battalion has its own

captains, lieutenants, warrant officers, sergeants and corporals.

A corporal is the lowest rank and he takes charge of a group of five soldiers, including himself. The next higher rank will be the sergeant and he takes charge of fifty soldiers.

The major will take charge of ten thousand soldiers and his own military leaders.

The colonel is ranked even higher and has the authority to lead the entire army into battle. There are some differences between the colonels like there are strong armies and weak armies. If Xiang Shaolong inserts the four colonels into positions of power, it is as good as letting Zhao Mu control the City Army.

Xiang Shaolong has a plan to counter this and is unafraid of such an arrangement.

Xiang Shaolong knows that Zhao Mu will never fully disclose his entire list of spies. A bright idea came to his mind and he asked: "The human mind is difficult to fathom. Does Marquis have any method to guarantee that they will not shy away and do their best for Marquis in times of urgent need?" Zhao Mu smiled bitterly: "No one can guarantee that!"

Xiang Shaolong thought of contracts and suggested: "I have an idea which is called the loyalty letter. Marquis can get your spies to write a loyalty letter, swear on it and hand the letter for your safe-keeping. If you are in trouble and the letters end up with King Xiaocheng, they will be in trouble as well.

Therefore, they will do their best and rebel with Marquis.”

Zhao Mu cannot tell that this is a trick and clapped: “Great idea! With these, our rebellion will surely be successful!”

Xiang Shaolong naturally started: “The first loyalty letter will be from me. This is to show my gratitude and loyalty to Marquis.”

Zhao Mu is so happy that he could hug Xiang Shaolong and kissed him. He got his attendant to fetch some brushes, ink and paper.

Except for his signature, Xiang Shaolong’s handwriting is unintelligible. But he had come so far and could only grit his teeth and wrote ‘Dong Kuang is loyal to Zhao Mu’ messily.

Zhao Mu does not hold it against him for he is a ‘tribesman’ after all.

Both men are now as close as brothers and there are no secrets between them.

Leaving the Marquis Residence, Xiang Shaolong hurried into the palace to see King Xiaocheng. When Xiang Shaolong said he has a secret message, he was summoned to the royal study.

This is the first time he was alone with King Xiaocheng and he knows that he has gained his full trust. He respectfully said: “General has successfully entered Zhao Mu’s circle of trust.”

King Xiaocheng was surprised: “How did Zhao Mu trust you so easily?” Xiang Shaolong answered: “We have been on good terms all along. The other reason is I wrote him a loyalty letter.”

He started to explain the whole situation and added: “Once we get hold of the loyalty letters, we will be very clear of who the traitors are and will not kill anyone wrongfully.”

King Xiaocheng was elated: “General Dong is brilliant to come up with such a plan. I can finally abandon my worries. When the time is ripe, General Dong must help me to raid his house and find the loyalty letters. We shall see who dares to rebel.”

Xiang Shaolong advised: “That is not the best move as it will stir infighting. Besides, Tian Dan is still waiting for opportunities to make his move. Let me get my hands on these letters and investigate first. When we have eliminated the palace traitors and prevent any infighting, we will then focus on the military traitors. Till then, even if Zhao Mu has three heads and six arms, he will still bow beneath our forces.”

King Xiaocheng could not stop nodding his head: “General shall see to it! Everything is at your disposal.”

Xiang Shaolong continued to give his report on his ‘defect’ to Tian Dan. King Xiaocheng was furious and cursed: “Thanks to your testing, this scum is indeed after our land”

Xiang Shaolong held more talks with him before bidding farewell

He had just left the study when a palace maid intercepted him on Empress Jing's orders.

He had known about King Xiaocheng's issue and that he does not care much for Empress Jing. But he had no idea that she was so brave to waylay him right after his meeting with King Xiaocheng. Helpless, he followed the palace maid into the inner palace.

Exactly like the last time, all the female attendants he met en route were all looking at him seductively.

These days, he has to attend morning court before the sun is up. Busy with his duties, he has no time to visit Zhao Ya or Ji Yanran. Back home, all the ladies are fast asleep. Even the Tian sisters who insist on waiting till he came home were asked to sleep first for Xiang Shaolong could not bear to see them losing sleep over him.

He has more time today and wanted to visit Talented Lady Ji or Zhao Ya. Unluckily, Empress Jing acted first and he was upset but powerless at the same time.

Until now, he does not have a clear picture of Zhao Mu's and Empress Jing's relationship. This will be a good chance to find out!

The palace maid brought him straight to a short tower in the east garden. The palace guards paid their respects to him and made him feel absolutely glorious and prestigious.

Another two palace maids opened the tower doors and winked at him smiling: “Empress is waiting for General on the second floor.”

Before he could react, the two girls are kneeling on the floor and helping him to remove his shoes.

Xiang Shaolong had a wild thought – you only live once. Since he came to this ancient time, if he could do it with a queen, it will be quite an accomplishment.

Thinking of her rejection the last time and her beautiful posture, his heart is now on fire.

He still has certain reservations. If King Xiaocheng found out about this, how will he deal with him?

In a dilemma, he climbed up the stairs.

Every step is as heavy as a ton.

Empress Jing is dressed in a luxurious robe and was sitting alone beside a long table. Seeing his appearance at the top of the steps, she cooed: “General is here. Please sit beside me.”

Xiang Shaolong pulled up his socks and sat on the other side of the long table. He sighed: “What orders does Empress have for me?” Empress Jing batted her extended eye lashes and slowly said: “Has General Dong just seen the King? Ai! Your King has been suffering from health problems recently and

he refused to get enough rest. I am really afraid that he may fall sick and can never get up anymore.”

Xiang Shaolong’s desires disappeared at once, having tasted her cruelty once more.

She sounds like she is concerned about King Xiaocheng but is secretly wishing for his end. Once the Crown Prince ascends the throne, a young chap around the age of Xiao Pan will simply listen to her command. At that point in time, she will own Xiang Shaolong. If he is smart, he will continue to do her bidding.

In a few words, she has spelt out the penalties and incentives clearly, adding a touch of intimacy and seduction, making it hard for anyone to reject her.

Before he could reply, Empress Jing clapped her hand once. Two palace girls came up the stairs and laid a jug of warm white wine as well as wine cups on the table between them and left.

Empress Jing personally poured two full cups of wine. Her fingers looked like they have never done any manual work before and her nails were painted in red. She handed one cup to Xiang Shaolong and raised her own cup. Facing Xiang Shaolong, she respectfully wished: “Congratulations on your glorious promotion to become our City Commander!”

Xiang Shaolong hurriedly added: “Thanks for Empress’s support!”

Dang!

The two cups collided in mid air. Covering her face with her sleeve, Empress Jing drank the wine in one shot. Within a short while, her cheeks turned rosy, adding to her attractiveness.

Xiang Shaolong swore: “Dong Kuang will never forget your kindness, please rest assured.”

Empress Jing shot a charming look at him and softly said: “I know you are not an ungrateful man. Ya! Your performance the other day was simply exciting. I am more and more confident in you. Hey! Look at yourself! Why are you so uneasy? Are you afraid that King Xiaocheng will find out about our meeting?” Xiang Shaolong sighed and frankly explained: “I am grateful for your trust but this meeting does seemed inappropriate. If the King misunderstands Empress, even my death will not be sufficient to redeem my sin.”

Empress Jing was tickled: “You speak very tactfully, unlike your usual self. I was the one who summoned you but you speak as if you initiate this meeting. Rest easy! The king does not bother about my affairs. He will not be upset with you. Does this make you feel better?” Xiang Shaolong is more and more confused about the abnormal state palace affairs. He was trying to get more news about Zhao Mu and her when Empress Jing suspiciously asked him: “Did Zhao Mu ever mention about me in front of you?” Xiang Shaolong honestly said: “Forgive my bluntness. Although Zhao Mu has never said anything directly, he has hinted that Empress Jing is in his side. Naturally, I did not report this to the King. Empress can rest easy.”

Empress Jing’s eyes were flashing viciously. She bit her teeth cursing: “So what if he knows? It is entirely his fault.”

From this, Xiang Shaolong knows that it has to do with the Sex games between King Xiaocheng and Zhao Mu. Even Empress Jing is part of their games. King Xiaocheng is truly an immoral pervert.

Empress Jing slowly sighed: “We are lucky for your reminder. Zhao Mu is an idiot to keep a dangerous animal at home. He even dares to provoke the ambitious Tian Dan.”

Xiang Shaolong wanted to jump for joy. This is called thinking too much. From this new information, he guessed that Empress Jing did want to conspire with Zhao Mu. With the introduction of Tian Dan, she beat a hasty retreat.

The relationship between these people fluctuates with their rise and fall in fortunes. If Zhao Mu really sits on the throne, Empress Jing may just leap into his arms.

Empress Jing batted her eye at him and frowned: “Why are you so quiet!”

Xiang Shaolong could tell that she voice is becoming more and more intimate. He was shaken and feigned: “I was thinking of what I can do next to make you happy regardless of the difficulty involved.”

Empress Jing was laughing uncontrollably for a while. She then seductively gazed at him and softly said: “You are delicate despite your rough behaviour and know how to make women happy. No wonder the h0rny Zhao Ya was intoxicated by you and throw Qi Yu, Han Chuang and Li Yuan out of her residence. Her spirits at an all time high, she has even forgotten about Xiang

Shaolong. I would love to have that experience as well. Fine! I know that you are occupied and will not waste any of your time.”

Xiang Shaolong was enchanted by her words and was thinking that he can taste the flavour of the high and mighty Zhao Queen. At the height of his emotions, she asked him to leave. He knows that the Empress is playing a game of ‘acting welcome but actually rejecting’. Hardening his heart with hatred, he bide his farewell helplessly.

Exiting the palace, he was tempted to visit Xiao Zhao and the rest. Suppressing this unwise decision, he head back to the Command Centre.

## Chapter 10

### Guo's Wedding Feast

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Back at the East Gate Army Command Centre, it is evening time and Teng Yi just came back from training the soldiers. They gathered in a study room that is filled with bamboo books and began talking.

Teng Yi gave him a general report of the City defences and ended: "Handan's available soldiers are actually twenty thousand only. The rest are old, weak, female or untrained recruits. If activated, they will only obstruct the rest and ruin the morale."

Xiang Shaolong advised: "Quality is more important than quantity. Second brother please assign the new soldiers and the weak and old to the camps outside the city. Let them undergo training or engage in preventive work."

Teng Yi reminded: "For this deployment, your army seal is insufficient. We need to get the other half of the seal from King Xiaocheng."

Xiang Shaolong reassured: "You can count on me." He continued to relate the issue of Zhao Mu's four colonels.

Teng Yi understood at once and laughed: "Got it! I will promote them based on their abilities and give them a non-existent workload."

Xiang Shaolong sighed: "I am lucky to have your assistance. Otherwise, these

complex issues will drive me crazy. How in the world did Le Cheng indulge in courtesans every night and hide so many women?” Teng Yi answered: “Easy. Delegate all the complex issues to Assistant General Zhao Ming Xiong but all the credit goes to him instead. Zhao Ming Xiong is a talent. He was sidelined as he was recommended by Lian Po. I heard that Le Cheng had wanted to demote him on many occasions but they were all overturned by your Ya’er personal intervention to King Xiaocheng. To think that Ya’er commands such influence over King Xiaocheng.”

After a moment of reflection, Xiang Shaolong asked about the Qi soldiers camping outside the city walls.

Teng Yi replied: “I have sent men to erect sentry towers at the four corners of the Qi camp and keep them under day and night observation. On the surface, there is nothing going on, even normal training. I suspect that they are digging tunnels and they are very discreet so we cannot detect anything. I have sent Little Jun to spy on them and we should have news soon.”

“Oh!” Teng Yi exclaimed: “I nearly forgot. Lord Longyang has sent someone to look for you and invited you to make a trip to his place. Guo Zhong is throwing a huge feast at his residence tonight. Not only are you invited, even I am included.”

Xiang Shaolong exchanged a look with him and they both shook their heads and sighed.

Teng Yi decided: “I won’t be going and will manage the fort here. Handan looks peaceful on the outside but it is full of killing aura. Any negligence and

it will be too late for regrets.”

Xiang Shaolong mused: “It’s all yours! Ai! What in the world are we doing, helping the Zhao solve their problems?”

Teng Yi stood up with him: “King Xiaocheng is giving Zhao Mu to you as a present, third brother must repay his kindness. Make a trip home first! I hardly see you talking to Shan Rou and the rest.”

Xiang Shaolong left with a reluctant smile.

With Wu Guo leading his entourage out of the Command Centre, he ran into Tian Dan’s entourage. Xiang Shaolong naturally knew that Tian Dan is coming specially for him and entered his carriage.

The Liu Brothers are seated behind Tian Dan while Xiang Shaolong is seated beside him. This Qi leader smiled: “Brother Dong is an excellent City Commander. The whole situation looks powerful and refreshing.”

After apologising, he added: “To gain the trust of King Xiaocheng, I have sent someone to monitor your entourage. Please forgive me.”

Tian Dan joyfully patted his shoulder: “I am not an unreasonable man.” Continuing in a low voice: “Have you found out who killed Le Cheng?” Xiang Shaolong nearly fell apart and hurriedly replied: “If I am not mistaken, it is done by Xiang Shaolong. A few days later, he was detected at a village near Handan City.”

Tian Dan mysteriously laughed at his words and plainly state: “This must be Xiang Shaolong’s doing. No one else hated Le Cheng as much as he. In fact, Le Cheng is the first target. If Zhao Mu is not the next target, then it will be King Xiaocheng himself.”

Xiang Shaolong could feel all his bones freezing and was like a fish out of water.

Tian Dan coldly thinks aloud: “If it is done by Xiang Shaolong, this matter will be very interesting. Where is he hiding in Handan? Who is his spy to track Le Cheng’s movements so accurately? Can Brother Dong answer these questions?” Xiang Shaolong answered in a deep voice: “If I am Xiang Shaolong, I will not be so stupid to hide in the City. Regarding the spy, it is a piece of cake. The Wu Family has deep connections here. There will surely be someone who will cooperate with him”

Tian Dan continued smiling: “Why did he alert the city with Le Cheng’s killing? ”

Xiang Shaolong was startled and cannot comprehend where he is coming from. He frowned: “What does Chancellor Tian thinks?” Tian Dan stared at the dark street and slowly said one word at a time: “Xiang Shaolong has been back for quite some time already. I can feel it.”

Xiang Shaolong had a big fright. He lowered his voice and asked: “Does Chancellor Tian know where he is?” He vowed that if his cover is blown, he will kill him right away regardless of the consequences.

Tian Dan let out a very long sigh: “Xiang Shaolong is the most extraordinary man I have ever known. King Xiaocheng did not treasure him and missed out a great opportunity to regain the glory of Zhao.”

Shaking his head, he sighed again and patted Xiang Shaolong on his shoulder: “Mark my words. There are spies in Le Cheng’s personal escort team. Investigate those that did not go along with Le Cheng that fateful night and you will find the spy. Do a good job. If we can really apprehend Xiang Shaolong, we can use him in an exciting negotiation.”

Xiang Shaolong was astonished: “What negotiation?” Tian Dan simply said: “Like exchanging him for Zhao Ya’s Lu Gong Secret Manual.”

Xiang Shaolong was amazed. This man is too scary for words. If not for his fake identity, he will not be able to play this game with Tian Dan and may even lose everything he has.

At this point, the horse carriage is driving up the hill road leading to the Guo Residence. As the carriage bumped forward, Tian Dan casually asked: “Where did Brother Dong learn his art of city defence?” Xiang Shaolong had anticipated this question and shrugged his shoulders: “Everything I know is from personal experience. After numerous battles, I know soldiering. After living with horses, I know how to breed them. It is nothing actually.”

Tian Dan maintained his silence for a while before inquiring: “Why did Brother Dong look up to me?” Xiang Shaolong acted like he was full of sincerity and explained: “Horse breeders must first know how to take care of their horses. Please excuse my eccentricity. Comparing horses to human,

among those I have seen, there are none as good as Chancellor's Tian horses."

Tian Dan was laughing so hard he started to cry. He readily accepts his answer and warned: "You have to guard against Li Yuan. He is extremely narrow-minded and hates you to the core. He will not stop until you are dead. Especially after Zhao Ya become intoxicated with you and ruin his chances at Lu Gong's Secret Manual. Remember, he will stop at nothing."

Xiang Shaolong has no more doubts that Tian Dan and Li Yuan are the masterminds behind Lord Longyang's assassination. The Guo Residence came into view. Xiang Shaolong quietly cursed that he cannot even share a proper conversation with Shan Rou and the Tian sisters. He wonders if he will get to see Ji Yanran, Zhao Ya or even Zhao Zhi.

He has lost a lot of excitement in his life.

The Guo Residence is brightly lit and full of guests, adding to the festivities.

Xiang Shaolong slipped out of the carriage before entering the residence separately to avoid being seen with Tian Dan.

When he stepped into the residence after Tian Dan, he could see Guo Zhong giving Tian Dan a warm welcome and is busy introducing him to the other famous Zhao dignitaries, making him the centre of attention.

Xiang Shaolong was secretly happy. He retreated down the road leading to the residence and glided into a big garden in front of the residence. He

breathed deeply and was energised by the refreshing cool air and caught a whiff of fragrance.

Xiang Shaolong turned around and Zhao Ya appeared at his side. Grabbing his arm, she dragged him towards a little pavilion deeper into the picturesque garden. She praised: “Ya’er thought Master Ding will be unavailable. Ai! You are really capable. Only a few days have passed and you have improved the military strength of Handan City. With such good defence, no one will miss Le Cheng.”

After crossing two bridges, they came to a pavilion by a pond. The human voice and lights seemed to come from another dimension. They seemed to be in an isolated paradise of their own.

Xiang Shaolong leaned on the stone fence and put his hand around her thin waist and smiled: “I have decided to help your brother (Zhao King) resolve the danger surrounding Handan City. How are you going to thank me?” Zhao Ya trembled slightly and leaned into his bosom saying: “Ya’er can only get rid of her old ways and become Master Dong’s most obedient woman!” In a low voice, she continued: “Can you really forget the past wrongdoings? Ya’er is afraid that King Xiaocheng cannot withstand another blow.”

Xiang Shaolong cannot help but to look at her with mistrust. Zhao Ya had a big shock and cried; “You have no confidence in me!”

Xiang Shaolong simply reassure: “Set your mind at ease. I have a great plan and I promise that your brother will never know that Xiang Shaolong has ever been to Handan or has even been the City Commander.”

Still upset, Zhao Ya mumbled: “Zhao Ya understands.”

Seeing her crestfallen look, Xiang Shaolong took pity on her. Kissing her lips, he smiled: “Do not worry. As long as you do what you promised, how can I not love you?”

Zhao Ya slowly said: “Will you really bring me away?” Xiang Shaolong knows that she is terrified and may have wild thoughts or worry incessantly. He seriously state: “Why would I have the heart to deceive a poor girl like you who is looking for your drop of honey?” Zhao Ya’s face began to turn red and she stomped her feet and whined: “I am dissatisfied. After you became Dong Kuang, I still gave all my love to you and my body as well and yet you still bullied me.”

Xiang Shaolong had a good laugh. Moving his hands lower, he strongly slapped her two firm bums and asked; “Why is Guo Zhong arranging such a huge feast tonight?”

Zhao Ya was surprised: “You are really immersed in your work and have no inkling that Tycoon Guo is marrying his daughter to Li Yuan.”

Xiang Shaolong was shaken and enquired: “Guo Zhong is really leaving; will your brother let him off?” Zhao Ya sighed: “The alliance discussion is on hold because of Yan and King Xiaocheng refused to give in. Guo Zhong is a man who only looks at profits. He will not wait here for the Qin army to conquer the city. With Li Yuan as his son-in-law, what can brother do?” Xiang Shaolong comment: “If you leave with me too, wouldn’t your brother be heart-broken?” Zhao Ya was in a state of panic and faintly said: “Have I not

done my best for him? I did not even hold Sister Ni's death against him and nearly cause the death of my most beloved. Only he owes me; what do I owe him? As a female, what more can I achieve? I know him better than anyone. Don't be too happy with his appreciation. Once the danger is over, he will treat you differently. Lian Po and Li Mu did so much for the state and look at them now. He only cares about himself and my heart for him is dead. Ai! If my brother is dead and that woman becomes the Dowager, her first target will be poor me. How can I not leave?" Xiang Shaolong concluded: "I am relieved to hear these words from you."

Still unconvinced, Zhao Ya declared: "Still disbelieving? For you, I am willing to die without any regrets.'

Before he could reply, Zhao Ya added: "The main banquet will be held in Chu. Guo Zhong will have to preside the dinner at the capital of Chu. You should understand!"

Xiang Shaolong was enlightened and affirmed: "Great move! Come, let's join in the fun!"

He slapped her back, saying: "You go back first or everyone will be jealous of me."

Zhao Ya passionately asked; "Shall I come to your place tonight?" Xiang Shaolong thought of Shan Rou and frowned: "We shall confirm later! Is Talented Lady Ji coming?" Zhao Ya proudly said: "She is here long ago and is busy looking for her lover. Luckily Ya'er acted first."

Xiang Shaolong is very entertained and chased her away before entering the building.

The garden is filled with performers to keep the guests occupied. Seeing this new office-bearer, everyone came to welcome him. By the time Xiang Shaolong managed to extricate himself, Han Chuang led him to a corner and praised: "General Dong is a man of talent. I have never seen Sister Jing having such a high opinion of anyone."

Xiang Shaolong humbly replied: "It is all thanks to Marquis's arrangement."

Han Chuang cursed: "Don't worry. I have put in the best word for you in front of Empress. You must guard against Guo Kai the scum. He is currently spreading rumours that you have laid the Queen to get your promotion to City Commander. Hei! This cunning bastard dared to act so recklessly only because he is the lover of King Xiaocheng. I cannot take this lying down."

Xiang Shaolong exclaimed: "What?!" Han Chuang continued: "No many people knows about this. Outside the palace, probably not even a single person knows. King Xiaocheng cannot do without men. Too bad you are not g@y or you can replace him."

Every strand of Xiang Shaolong's hair is standing at its end. He coughed: "Let's stop here."

Han Chuang intimately added: "It is better you love women! The Queen is a rare beauty and if you can make her happy, Zhao will be at your command when the Crown Prince ascends the throne. When that happens, do not

forget your old friend Han Chuang.”

Xiang Shaolong could tell that Han Chuang wants to control Empress Jing through him. He can also deduce that Empress Jing is not fully obedient towards him. Afraid that he will ask for the Tian sisters, he dragged Han Chuang towards the building and warned as they walked: “Marquis must take precautions. I suspect Qi and Chu are behind Lord Longyang’s attack.”

Han Chuang turned pale: “What?!” Xiang Shaolong is confident that Empress Jing does not share all her knowledge with Han Chuang. They ran into another group of guests and Xiang Shaolong took the chance to slip away and strode towards the main banquet hall.

In the centre of the hall, Guo Zhong stood there and welcomed him: “General Dong is newly promoted to be our City Commander and I have yet to send my congratulations.”

Xiang Shaolong swept his gaze and did not see his two sons. He guessed that Guo Zhong must have followed Wu Yingyuan’s example and sent his sons away first. He shook his hands and politely said: “It should be General congratulating Mister. You have gained such a handsome son-in-law. All the potential father-in-laws in Handan can only stand aside and watch with hatred and jealousy.”

Guo Zhong laughed: “Talking with you is always a joyful occasion.”

The main hall is now filled with various guests, numbering almost a thousand. Some of the more reclusive powerful families were also present in their best

outfits. With the grand attires and fanfare, who could have guessed that Handan is in danger of war?

Xiang Shaolong's sharp eyes caught Li Yuan who is situated at the other side of the main hall. He is cheerfully chatting with Tian Dan, Guo Kai and Cheng Dan.

Empress Jing made her entrance but King Xiaocheng is absent to show his displeasure.

Ji Yanran can also be seen with another group of people. Even the anti-social Zou Yan is here. Yanran is chatting intimately with the just-recovered Lord Longyang. Both of them are old friends and are naturally close.

Zhao Ba and Zhao Zhi are helping to usher in the guests. Zhao Zhi saw Xiang Shaolong and her eyes widened. Abandoning her company of extinguished ladies, she flew over like a bird.

Xiang Shaolong was blaming himself for being muddle-headed and coming without a present so he took the chance to excuse himself and met up with Zhao Zhi.

This unique beauty whined upon contact: "General Dong! Zhi Zhi hasn't seen you for so many days and is suffering in agony! You must accompany me tonight no matter what happens."

Before anything could happened, Lord Longyang appeared out of nowhere between them. With his warm eyes staring deeply into his own eyes, he

stretched his hand and held onto Xiang Shaolong's hands tightly and cooed: "Except for Wei King, I have never felt as much gratitude to anyone compared to Brother Dong. No matter what happens, Brother Dong must not forget that there is someone waiting for you in Daliang."

Xiang Shaolong could feel all his goose pimples standing. He was embarrassed and upset but cannot bear to pull his hand away after seeing how emotional and lonely the other party is. Choosing to believe that he is just affectionate towards both sexes, he started to feel better and consoled him by patting in his shoulder and said: "Dong Kuang understands. Please have a safe journey."

As Lord Longyang released his hand, he caught Han Chuang walking over. Afraid that he may ask for the Tian sisters, he begged Lord Longyang: "Lord, please help me detain this man."

Lord Longyang was surprised momentarily and happily intercepted Han Chuang.

With the help of Zou Yan, Ji Yanran managed to extricate herself from a group of admirers and greeted him: "Dong Kuang! You are so busy that you do not have time to visit me?" Xiang Shaolong wanted to say that he will bed her tonight but he remembered Zhao Ya and Zhao Zhi and held back his tongue. To distract her, he asked in a low voice: "What are they here for?" Ji Yanran was annoyed and drummed: "I had said that they were after the Lu Gong Secret Manual! What else is there? Dong Kuang! Are you ignoring me?"

This time, he is really in trouble. He laughed: "You are not afraid of Mister

Zou teasing?” In his heart he is groaning. Only a few days of rest and he has to manage three sessions tonight?

Ji Yanran looked over at Zou Yan and laughed: “Why are you so formal? He is my godfather! There is no one here and you, Dong the heartless man, need not be so polite.”

Xiang Shaolong looked at the sniggering Zou Yan and smiled: “I’ll have no reservations then. Tonight, I will dig out my heart for Talented Lady Ji’s to see.”

Ji Yanran then brightened up.

Xiang Shaolong took the opportunity to ask: “What did Miss Ji do that ended the dreams of Li Yuan and make him willing to marry Miss Guo?” Ji Yanran hissed: “Nothing works. He came to me today and told me that the official wife position is still available but I kicked him out.”

Li Yuan looked over to them and his face is full of hatred.

The bell sounded and it is time to start the banquet.

## **Chapter 11**

### **Zhao Palace On Fire**

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As all the guests are swarming in, Xiang Shaolong pondered over Ji Yanran's words. The more he thought, the more uneasy he is and slipped out to find Wu Guo.

Wu Guo happened to be spouting nonsense with a group of guests who have yet to enter the banquet hall. He was startled to see Xiang Shaolong and he embarrassedly came to his side and asked: "Third Master is leaving so soon?" Xiang Shaolong does not hold it against him and seriously spoke: "Notify Second Master at once. Tell him that Prince Xinling has sent a team of experts to Handan and could take tonight's chance to steal the Lu Gong Secret Manual"

Wu Guo scratched his head: "The palace guards and the city guards like us do not mix. Unless approved by King Xiaocheng, we will get thrown out."

Xiang Shaolong agreed that this is a problem. He warned: "In this case, get second master to send someone to monitor the palace from outside. If there are any suspicious people, he can use this excuse to infiltrate. Oh! If we can only use our elite troops. Pay attention to the secret tunnels entrances. Prince Xinling may even have the map of the secret tunnels or even a spy in the palace."

Wu Guo left with his order.

Xiang Shaolong heaved a sigh of relief and head back to the banquet.

Before he could take another step, a melodious voice sounded out from his left: "Mister Dong! Please wait."

Xiang Shaolong found the voice familiar and looked towards the source.

Under the company of eight female attendants, Guo Xiu'er was dressed in a flamboyant red cheongsam. Walking along the left stone path, it appears that she is about to take part in the engagement dinner.

Xiang Shaolong halted and unnaturally congratulates her.

Guo Xiu'er returned the favour and discharged the attendants: "I need to have a word with Mister Dong; all of you wait for me at the side."

The attendants were taken by surprise and retreated to a distance.

Guo Xiu'er ran her eyes over Xiang Shaolong. In an unhappy tone, she sighed: "Father's orders cannot be disobeyed. Xiu'er has no choice. Can Mister understand what I mean?" Xiang Shaolong is stunned by her frankness and was dumbfounded. In such a short time, he does not know how to reply her.

Even if there is no obstacle between them, based on the family rivalry between Wu and Guo, there is no way that he can marry her!

Guo Xiu'er smiled sadly and turned around. When she turned back, there is a jade pendant on her hand. She stepped closer and pressed it into his hand,

emotionally saying: “Xiu’er cannot give my body to Mister so I have to replace it with this jade pendant. If you have feelings for me, please wear it and I will die without regrets.”

Finishing, she lowered her head and hastily walked towards the main hall while the attendants frantically caught up.

In ecstasy, Xiang Shaolong held the jade pendant tightly. The jade pendant is still warm with her holding.

He opened up his palm and took a closer look.

It is an ancient jade carving of a phoenix. If he had brought back to a 21st Century auction, the proceeds will be able to last his expenditure for a lifetime.

Thinking of this, he scolded himself.

The girl is passionate and innocent but he has such crazy notions.

Shaking his head, he hanged the pendant around his neck before participating in the feast.

The main hall is full of activity. Hundreds of servants are shuttling in and out of the main hall, serving the guests with dishes and wine.

There are four VIP tables facing the main door.

The first table is Guo Zhong and his wife with Li Yuan and Guo Xiu’er. The

other three tables are taken by Empress Jing, Tian Dan, Lord Longyang, Han Chuang, Ji Zhong and other people.

The other tables are lined up on the two sides. Each side has three layers of tables and each table seats four people. The centre area is left open for the performances of singers and dancers.

A group of musicians were based on both sides of the main door and were actively playing their instruments. The air is filled with drumming and cheering and everyone is in a celebratory mood.

While everyone is distracted by Guo Xiu'er entry, Xiang Shaolong slipped to the back row of the tables and wondered where he should sit?

The seats are arranged according to status and he cannot just take any empty seat.

Fortunately, the Guo Chief Housekeeper Gao Bai saw him from afar and rushed forward informing: "Princess Ya has instructed servant that she wants to sit with General. General, please come with me."

Xiang Shaolong panicked. If he is seated with Zhao Mu, Ji Yanran and Zhao Zhi have nothing to say. If he sits with Zhao Ya, they will be jealous and throw tantrums at him. There is a price to pay for having multiple lovers.

He ignored this potential problem and accompanied Gao Bai to the VIP tables.

Among the distinguished guests, many of them are viewing this legendary City Commander for the first time and many of them greeted him.

The women are all eyeing his well-build frame and heroic air. Xiang Shaolong was having mixed feelings. He disregarded every stare and blindly followed Gao Bai, walking between the tables and the wall. Gao Bai stopped and bowed: "General please be seated."

Xiang Shaolong looked carefully and he saw three pairs of beautiful eyes staring straight back at him.

Zhao Ya, Ji Yanran and Zhao Zhi are seated on the same table as him. The other table is Zhao Mu, Guo Kai, Cheng Dan and Zou Yan.

Xiang Shaolong was rejuvenated and silently admire Zhao Ya's thoughtfulness. He sat on the far end of the table beside Zhao Zhi. This is a smart move. If he had sat between two girls, the third one will be neglected. This is also to show his respect for the three girls.

Every guy is envious of him to share the table with three ladies while every girl is dying to replace the three girls to get closer to this popular figure.

The drumming stopped suddenly and sounded again. Over a hundred pretty courtesans glide into the main area and began singing and dancing.

Zhao Zhi whispered: "Sister Yanran told me to ask you where you went earlier?" Xiang Shaolong joked: "Can't I even go to the bathroom?" Zhao Zhi leaned towards Ji Yanran to pass the answer and whispered back: "Why are

you in the bathroom for such a long time?” Xiang Shaolong could not hold back his laughter and nearly choked on his food. He endured and asked: “When has Zhi Zhi become a telephone? Every business can be big or small. Even the heavenly gods has no control.”

Zhao Zhi burst out in laughter too and passed the message after she tried to hold her laughter.

Zhao Ya and Ji Yanran were laughing till their tears came out. Zhao Zhi cheekily asked again: “Princess saw that you and Guo Xiu’er almost came in at the same time and there is a change in both your expressions. Did you pull a fast one on her and snatched Li Yuan’s prize?”

Xiang Shaolong could only acknowledge her sharp observation and denied everything.

The singing and dancing ended and so did their flirting.

Guo Zhong stood up and gave a speech, announcing Guo Xiu’er engagement to Li Yuan. The actual wedding will be held in the Capital of Chu. This is followed by toasting and the hall is filled with happiness.

Xiang Shaolong look at Guo Xiu’er’s complexion carefully and she looks like a woman resigned to her fate. Feelings swell up in him

If he had never entered the picture, Guo Xiu’er will never have that expression for Li Yuan is indeed a dream son-in-law.

No matter how talented he is, he cannot solve her problem for it is fated that they can never be together.

For the power-holders in these warring times, marriage is just a political game. The higher the status of the female, the higher the stakes in politics. Thinking deeply, when Wu Yingyuan married his daughter to him, it is also a strategy to keep his loyalty. It is a coincidence that Wu Tingfang really loved him or it will be just another tragedy.

For Zhao Qian and him to succeed as a couple is another miracle.

Xiang Shaolong became very emotional and drank another two cups and wine.

Zhao Zhi whispered again: “Zhi Zhi wished that she could make mincemeat out of Tian Dan right now but I am willing to wait because I know that Master Dong will get him at the end.”

Xiang Shaolong thinks that Zhao Zhi is overestimating him and softly comment: “Isn’t it better to think about happy stuff?” Zhao Zhi thought that he is teasing her and her face became red and she added: “Zhi Zhi will await Master Dong’s instructions!”

Xiang Shaolong had a sudden inspiration.

There is a difference between Zhao Zhi and Guo Xiu’er. Both of them agree that the man should be the head of the household and should obey his will even at the cost of their own dreams and thinking.

The difference is that Zhao Zhi has more luck than Guo Xiu'er!

In the same light, Ji Yanran and Shan Rou are women who are opposed to the normal treatment of women. Just like Mo Zi's opposition of absolute power in a single person and the unnecessary rituals and ceremonies.

Mo Zi is a male so his teachings are carried forward for years.

No matter how profound are Ji Yanran's philosophies, others will only take note of her beauty.

Simply because of Guo Xiu'er forced marriage to Li Yuan, Xiang Shaolong was thinking about an entire chain of events and is lost in his thoughts. Out of a sudden, a round of fierce footsteps roused him from his semi-consciousness.

The main hall quietened down and every one watched in puzzlement as a group of Zhao soldiers scrambled into the main hall and even knocked down a tray of food and wine in the process. They continue to fill up the centre of the hall and when they identified Xiang Shaolong, they frantically rush to him and under the looks of everyone, reported: "General Dong, the palace is on fire!"

Everyone present was in a state of shock.

The palace fire was soon extinguished but Zhao Ya's chamber is burnt to the ground. There are over thirty charred corpses, including that of Xiao Zhao and over ten palace guards. No one escaped alive and all the bodies have sword scars or arrow scars.

Zhao Ya is crying her eyes out and is supported by two palace maids.

By the time Xiang Shaolong and the rest have checked out the scene, the palace guards have searched the entire palace but cannot find a trace of the enemy. The only discovery is that a nearby tunnel has been broken into and the four palace guards securing it are strangled to death.

Cheng Dan's expression is even worse than King Xiaocheng's. As the leader of the palace guards, he must take responsibility for this intrusion. He could be stripped of his post or even beheaded as a result.

King Xiaocheng's hands were shaking like a leaf. Under the heavy escort of the palace guardians, he blew his top and harshly scolded: "All of you are idiots, if the attackers are not after the book but after me, won't I be... Humph!"

All the palace guardians were terrified and they all knelt down in silence.

Xiang Shaolong thought of Xiao Zhao and his heart was bleeding.

Guo Kai and the rest of the officials are lost as they witness the horrific disaster.

Xiang Shaolong is burning with a thirst for revenge. If the enemy just wants the secret manual, he can just grab it and escape. There is no need to take any lives or even set fire. The act of killing Xiao Zhao shows that the attacker is doing this for revenge.

Teng Yi came to Xiang Shaolong's back and gave him small tug to signal that he has something to say.

Xiang Shaolong left the crowd with him and Teng Yi whispered: "We have discovered the hideout of the criminals. They are hiding in Han Chuang's residence."

Xiang Shaolong was blown away. "What!" He exclaimed. Teng Yi affirmed: "There is no mistake. Jing Jun personally led our elite men and trailed them. They were seen entering Han Chuang's residence and are still under observation. Even with wings, they will not be able to escape."

Thoughts raced through Xiang Shaolong's mind.

He thought of the Three State Alliance plan and the three leaders who pushed for it. Zhao's Lord Pingyuan is dead, leaving Wei's Prince Xinling Wei Wuji and Han Chuang's senior. It cannot be Han Chuang as he is too young and lack foresight.

A clear picture appeared in his brain.

After Lord Pingyuan's death, there is no strong official pushing for this alliance. Wei and Han are still working hard on this dream.

This is the reason why Han Chuang harboured Prince Xinling's men.

If Prince Xinling's men did not kill, Xiang Shaolong may let them off as he does not place any importance on Lu Gong's Secret Manual.

But when this involves the blood debt of Xiao Zhao, even the gods will not be able to stop him.

Out of the blue, King Xiaocheng hollered: “Where is Dong Kuang?!”

Xiang Shaolong told Teng Yi: “Assemble our forces and be ready to move.”

He then strode towards King Xiaocheng.

Zhao Mu, Tian Dan, Lord Longyang, Han Chuang, Ji Zhong, Empress Jing and Li Yuan were all present. They were expressionless and wanted to see how King Xiaocheng manage this affair.

Pale-faced, King Xiaocheng stared hard at Xiang Shaolong and roared: “What kind of City Commander are you? You can’t even tell that we have enemies entering the city!”

Li Yuan, Guo Kai and Ji Zhong were delighted at his failure. Han Chuang quietly lowered his head as he did not expect Prince Xinling’s men to be so cruel and got his buddy Dong Kuang into trouble.

Empress Jing’s face is void of colour and supported King Xiaocheng while maintaining her silence.

Xiang Shaolong swept his eyes round the room and gathered everyone’s reaction.

He did not kneel down like Cheng Dan and proudly declared: “The murderers

have entered the City long ago but only execute their plans tonight.”

Han Chuang was frightened and was in a state of panic.

Li Yuan and company looked at him with disdain, meaning that he is running away from responsibility. If the attackers had come to Handan much earlier, he is not the City Commander yet and so he is not responsible for the slip-up.

King Xiaocheng seemed to have lost his senses and pointed his finger, scolding: “What makes you so sure?” Xiang Shaolong is beginning to understand this king better. As calm as still water, he reasoned: “This attack is carried out by people who have spies within the palace. The perpetrators have chosen the best time and acted with the best information. They come and go without leaving trace. Such plans cannot be consolidated on such a short notice. Based on my deductions, they must have been in Handan for some time and only chose to make their move tonight.”

King Xiaocheng regained his senses and began to analyse his words.

Tian Dan interrupted: “Why don’t Your Majesty let General Dong conduct a search for the enemies and atone for his mistakes?” Lord Longyang seconded his opinion.

Empress Jing whispered a few words into King Xiaocheng’s ears.

King Xiaocheng raised his blood-red eyes and glared at Xiang Shaolong, commanding: “I am giving you three day to dig out the culprits.” He faced the kneeling cum trembling Cheng Dan and added: “Lock this clown in the prison

first. If we cannot find the criminals, he shall accompany those who have died in the attack.”

Cheng Dan gave a tragic cry as he is dragged away by a few palace guards.

He turned to Xiang Shaolong again and warmly coughed: “You are not leaving yet?” Xiang Shaolong look at everyone and even smiled at the depressed Zhao Mu. He plainly said: “Such a simple matter; three days is too long. Before the sun is up tomorrow, the lost item will be placed on Your Majesty’s desk. Each and every one of the thieves will be captured. Even if they are dead, their heads will be presented. If I fail, Your Majesty need not lift a finger; I will not see the sun tomorrow myself.”

Finished and leaving the entire crowd dumbfounded, he stride in huge steps towards the palace doors.

Han Chuang’s complexion lost all colours of life. As everyone is focusing on the departing Xiang Shaolong, he smoothly sneaked away and chased Xiang Shaolong from another path.

At the big courtyard outside the palace door, Wu Guo and over a hundred elite troops are waiting by their horses.

Xiang Shaolong has a stern look and flew up his horse without a single word.

Han Chuang caught up to him and called for him to wait.

Xiang Shaolong had known that he would chase him and got a horse for him

and they rode out of the palace together.

Han Chuang is horrified: “Where is General Dong going to find the attackers?” Xiang Shaolong eyes were shining and he coldly look at him, replying: “Of course to your residence. Does Marquis think they will be hiding anywhere else?” Han Chuang was mortified: “General must be joking!”

Xiang Shaolong sighed: “I am not joking. I have received your kindness and I know that Marquis did not expect them to kill anyone. The matter can still be salvaged, depending on Marquis’s cooperation. Otherwise, I will not take responsibility for the end result. Marquis should know better!” He squeezed the horse belly and his war horse dashed forward.

Wu Guo and the rest followed his lead. Raising their horse whips, they rode forward at full speed. Gritting his teeth, Han Chuang pushed his horse to catch up.

Thunderous hoof beats filled the air and shattered the sleep of Handan’s citizens.

End of Book 09